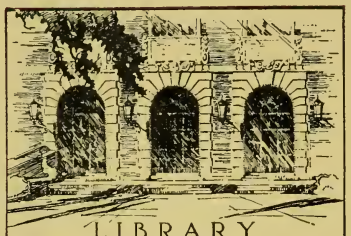

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MISS DAISY DIMITY

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"QUEENIE,"
"ORANGE LILY," "A JEWEL OF A GIRL,"
"MY LOVE, SHE'S BUT A LASSIE,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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"A nun demure, of lowly port;
Or sprightly maiden, of Love's court,
In thy simplicity the sport
Of all temptations;
A queen in crown of rubies drest;
A starvling in a scanty vest;
Are all as seem to suit thee best,
Thy appellations.

A little Cyclops, with one eye
Staring to threaten and defy,
That thought comes next—and instantly
The freak is over,
The shape will vanish, and behold!
A silver shield with boss of gold
That spreads itself, some fairy bold
In fight to cover."

WORDSWORTH.

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MISS DAISY DIMITY.

CHAPTER I.

"Die Rose, die Lilje, die Taube, die Sonne,
Die liebt' ich einst alle in Liebeswonne.
Ich lieb' sie nicht mehr, ich liebe alleine
Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine;
Sie selber, aller Liebe Bronne,
Ist Rose und Lilje und Taube und Sonne."

ON the morning after her first dance, Daisy woke with difficulty to find Mrs. Cox's housemaid observing in her ear, with respect-breathing loudness,

"Breakfast at eleven o'clock, miss."

"Dear me, how nice!" ejaculated our

slothful, small heroine; although, indeed, they had not been late the night before.

Then, finding she had ample time to dress, she got downstairs punctually for the belated meal.

Mrs. Cox was already down before her; but when Daisy, discovering this, exclaimed she felt ashamed of her own laziness, Mrs. Cox, as if fearing some slur might seem thrown on her own daughters by comparison, hastily answered, with an apologetic, tired smile,

"No, no, my dear; young people must enjoy themselves while they can. I—of course, I have been down since eight o'clock to see after the doctor and my little schoolboys. Things would never go right, if I did not . . . By-the-way, what nice gloves you wore last night! Do you mind telling me how much they cost?"

Daisy laughed, and told her they were

rather dear (since Madame Furbelow scorned keeping inferior articles).

She fancied her hostess made a rapid mental calculation, as she very mildly inclined her head while filling the tea-cups, ejaculating "Ah!" . . But she little imagined that the troubled mother was thinking to herself, "Four and sixpence last night at cards, and the extra money must come out of the milk-bill. Yes, I must get Fuzzy a pair. Major Hodge remarked he did not like mittens worn at dances. I saw him looking at hers out of the corner of his eye."

"I am afraid that my girls will not be down for some time," she presently remarked. "They are getting later and later. I have been vainly upstairs three times already, begging the three of them to get out of bed. You put them to shame, my dear! You see, when we have

only two maids (and an occasional help), it is hard to give several breakfasts."

Mrs. Cox, it will be seen, was growing intimate with Daisy; so much so that the poor soul laid aside many of her little pretences, and indulged in the relief of being at times honest.

She had hardly spoken before Birdie burst into the room, slamming the door behind her.

"Good morning!" she cried, with an utter ignoring of her mother's existence; although bestowing upon Daisy a sounding double kiss. "You see, I can be in time as well as you. Your brother bet me a sixpence I would not be down for breakfast; so you will tell him *I* am not the lazy one of our family, won't you? Mind you tell him, now!"

Yes, certainly Birdie had come down to breakfast; but how? It would have been

better if she had gone upstairs again.

Her touzled fringe of hair had plainly never been re-curled; without the semblance of having had a brush this morning, her yellow locks were twisted up tight. or, as Polly at Elm Hall called this style, *à la wash-tub* knot. An old serge gown seemed to have been hastily buttoned over a scarcity of garments, one button of which gown soon going off with a pop completed the disarray. Birdie, nothing daunted, replaced the lack with a pin; and went on healthily and hugely consuming bread and home-made blackberry jam, grumbling at her mother for being so stingy as not to give them marmalade.

Fuzzy came down when the meal was nearly ended. But then she was properly dressed; and though displeased in her turn that the maids could not make her fresh toast and boil an egg—since the one

hard-worked being was gone to market and the other was busy making the beds upstairs ; wisely refusing to hear the voice of the charmer—she speedily solaced herself with cold beef and pickles.

Mrs. Cox, with a sigh, then carried a tray upstairs to her third remaining daughter, for not till the midday dinner did soft-footed Pussy come lingeringly downstairs.

After dinner, a clatter of horses' hoofs was heard in the street; and, true to their word, Jack and Mr. Lee rode up. The Cox girls flew to see the mount, and to envy Daisy in her nice blue habit, looking as trim and tidy from her head to her heels as heart could wish.

"You'll do," muttered Jack, graciously, after surveying her; he was terribly particular as to his sister's dress, though merely ordinarily idea-d as regarded his

own; adding, "I wish I could say as much for your mount."

The middle-aged, thoroughbred mare that stood meekly awaiting Daisy, was no doubt termed middle-aged, in accordance with that polite custom of society which throws a veil over the age of all females.

"Such a lean head! That shows the blood in her," cried the enthusiastic Smiler.

True! But Daisy secretly regretted that the amiable thoroughbred was likewise lean of neck and lean of body altogether, so that its ribs showed, as Mark Twain says, like the pipes of an organ. In fact,

"As lene was" *her* "hors as is a rake."

"*And* goes like a lamb," ended the deluded young man.

The mare went more like an aged ewe in Daisy's mind as they started, being,

although meek, difficult to move. It had, apparently, but one engrossing wish, which was to muse in peace, "how flesh is grass, and grass is turned to hay."

They went countrywards through the most quiet suburban roads, upon Jack's insistance; somewhat to the Smiler's vexation, who made several ineffectual attempts to induce his friend to ride down the High Street.

"No, no," replied young Dimity. "If my sister can hardly manage to make her mare to *go*, it strikes me you have quite as much to do to keep your animal from going *off*."

"Wait till we get out a bit into the country, old fellow. You'll see a gallop will waken up your sister's animal and quiet mine down. I got mine from a dealer, Miss Dimity, who won't hire out his horses as a rule. Handsome, isn't he?

Fresh?—oh! yes; hasn't been out of the stable for a day or two, I should think. Great thing to get such a chance. It is not everyone he would lend him to. But I bamboozled the old fellow, though he never saw me in his life before. Ho, ho, ho! a little chaff, you see, goes a long—"

At this moment the Smiler's horse, a sulky, strong, black brute, gave a succession of kicks—that seemed intended to send him and his chaff a very much longer way off than he had meditated. The little man stuck on gallantly, however, although it apparently kept him very busy.

And now it struck Daisy most forcibly that he was far from at home in his saddle; and seemed to have more theory than experience as to his management of the reins.

"Does he ride much?" she whispered to Jack, with misgivings; as their companion

was suddenly carried off from them, to his manifest discomfort, in a caracoling fashion.

"What rounds, what bounds, what course, what stop he makes."

"Never saw him on horseback in my life before! Everybody supposed he couldn't ride; and upon my word I believe everybody was right," rejoined Jack, wrinkling his boyish brow, that had deep wrinkles brought to it every hour of the day by similar trifling cares.

Indeed, it had been rather a regimental wonder to see Smiler Lee go out this day on horseback. Many were the small bets as to whether he would come back unharmed. It was well known he could not drive, having only once or twice been induced to handle the ribbons—which he did by holding each rein in either hand well apart, and lirruping loudly at the

horse. But within the wildest imagination of man it was not supposed he could be got to ride!

As to hunting, in spite of all his other accomplishments, he always frankly declared on this point his abhorrence of having his neck broken, and utter determination beforehand that, if ever anything did induce him to behave so rashly, he should get off at every fence, and, after making himself and steed clamber over the obstacle (if feasible) separately, should remount safely on the opposite side. What glamour, therefore, must little Miss Dimity have thrown over him, that, after she had innocently spoken of her love of riding, he should at once have been bitten with the mad desire thus to shine in her favourite exercise!

Presently Mr. Lee, with vast difficulty, contrived to restrain his fractious beast

sufficiently to let the brother and sister come for a few delusive moments within safe distance of him.

With equal difficulty poor Daisy kept urging hers so as to keep pace with Jack's honest cob, his private property. She grew so impatient with her shambling equine Bag-o'-bones, that, but for pure pity, she would have liked to pommel it, to whip it, to take to her own nimble heels and baul it by the bridle.

"Oh! Jack dear," she whispered, fairly maddened at last, "I wish he had hired a donkey-boy, too, for me, to run behind and whack."

"Sh—! Poor old Lee might hear you, and he would be so awfully vexed. But, hallo!—I say! By Jove! Why, if that isn't Captain Gascoigne riding on there ahead of us! Why, Lee" (with much reproach), "I thought you told me Gascoigne

could not come out with us to-day."

"No; I only said I thought he could not," in a tone of far from equal delight; and suddenly seeming to own that the black horse was rather hard to master, by way of stopping any further inquiries.

"If I had known that—— Why, I was almost certain you had asked him. He is the *one* man I would have asked to make one of our party," ejaculated young Dimity; who was secretly as hugely dissatisfied at this semblance of a slight to his dearest friend, as was Lieutenant Lee on being brought into unfavourable comparison with as fine a rider as the one ahead.

Luckily for Jack, his well-beloved Damon was not far in front; so, riding on, he soon caught him up, and had made voluble explanations, and easily induced him to join their party to Galloper Down, before Daisy and the Smiler came up, the one halting,

the other demi-vaulting, at opposite sides of the road.

It was as much as Gascoigne and Jack could do, to refrain from a roar of laughter as they watched their approach.

And now what the poor Smiler had lamentably foreseen, occurred. He dared not approach Daisy; since the black horse was misbehaving most atrociously. Captain Gascoigne, on the other hand, could and did. For his horse had a delightful temper, and, as to looks, made everyone break the tenth commandment. He himself, too, was a famous rider; and at his very best in every way on horseback.

This day he was in especially good spirits; and made himself so agreeable that poor Daisy grew all the more ashamed of her own apparent stupidity.

"What a guy he must think I look on this ugly old creature! What a goose he

must think me for not being able to talk better to him" (her mind being fretted with vainly trying to fret her Rosinante)!

The mare, meanwhile, with a humble obstinacy that was fairly distracting, seemed resolved to crawl nowhere but with her nose at a level with Gascoigne's horse's tail. Try as he might to keep pace with her, no! she slipped ever back like the famous progress of the snail up the wall, with a drooping head, as if shambling to execution.

Daisy grew maddened; her cheeks got red with impatience; her arm sore with mild persistence in using an unavailing whip.

And Jack was loudly joking at her expense.

"What a pity Mrs. Browne's Blessing is not out with us! You and Higginbotham would go capitally together to-

day. I have told Captain Gascoigne all about the determined way in which you tried to captivate that poor young man, and he thinks you have excellent taste."

"Oh, Jack—Captain Gascoigne never could have said *that!*" with a sudden look of hurt feeling, yet trust; implying, without being aware of it, by the expression of her upturned young face, "He does say satirical things and misjudge me—but he is hardly so bad as that!"

"Thank you for having a sufficiently good opinion of me, Miss Dimity; which happens to be right," replied Gascoigne; adding, with a smile of apology for paying a compliment, "I believe it was his good taste that I allowed myself to commend. It surprised me in that gentleman, I must own, for, on seeing him once, it struck me that he was,

'Rather like the snail;
Known chiefly for the house upon his back.'"

Daisy feebly laughed in the background.

The Smiler was ill-judged enough to echo the mirth, with his usual good-fellowship, from the front. His horse instantly executed a gambado of the most furiously wrathful description; and forthwith, to show *his* playfulness, began dancing sideways, with his hind legs in the gutter. Only, as regarded his rider, he decidedly wanted to make this performance a *pas seul*.

Unhappy, lightsome Lee still tried to jest; but it was evident to everyone else that, while he strove to make a comedy of this ride, the proud animal he bestrode bitterly resented any buffoonery; and was resolved to make it, if not a tragedy, at least serio-comic.

"He'll be off soon; and your sister will be down," uttered Gascoigne, in quiet,

nervous unhappiness for Daisy, aside to Jack Dimity, as they went down a hill in the open country. "How could Lee be so cheated as to choose her such a brute; not fit to carry any lady?"

"Oh, it will have to do her well enough for to-day. Trust her to keep it up; she never let the governor's old horse at home down in her life, though I have—"

In a good hour, be it spoken! he should have added.

Sl—i—i—ther! Scra—amble! *Down!* No! Hi; holloa! Up again!

"Well done; well saved, Miss Dimity."

"Touch and go that time, Daisy."

There were some loose stones on the hill-side, which the poor old mare's shaky forelegs could not find foothold on; and so she had all but slid upon her knees.

"If it was not a fall, it was as bad as one," cried wretched Daisy, so unnerved

by all she had undergone, she was ready to weep.

Before she had ended, the black horse flung out in a volley of furious kicks; the failure of his mean-spirited companion to unseat one of their common enemies having goaded him to madness.

One, two, three! The luckless Smiler Lee at last "pighte him on the pomel of his head" in the dismal ditch. The black horse at once made a disgraceful attempt to complete his ill-conduct by galloping stablewards—but was frustrated by Gascoigne, who managed to catch his bridle.

"Look here, Dimity! we have had enough of this nonsense, surely," exclaimed the latter apart to Jack; in a tone of angered decision that, coming from him, who was usually so gentle, was rare.

Jack looked at him, astonished. Still he was used to say before now, to others who

spoke of Gascoigne's quietness, "He's quiet enough; but, mind you, if once he does put his foot down, he means it."

Gascoigne continued:

"That horse would have gone quietly enough, or, at least, far better, if Lee only knew how to ride him. Your sister is miserable; her whole day's enjoyment is being spoilt; besides, she is positively in danger! I'll tell you what we must do—get off and change saddles here at this farmyard. I'll make Lee give me up his horse; and your sister shall have mine. Then, at all events, however Lee and I get on, you and she can have a good canter on Galloper Down, and enjoy yourselves."

So said; so done. Gascoigne cut short all remonstrances; indeed, the Smiler was too crestfallen to offer any with much fervour, and eyed the black horse with a

glance of injured confidence and intense dislike.

"If ever you catch me on your back again, you brute!" he murmured to himself, heartily wishing this day's ride was over.

But Daisy, with anxious eyes and parted lips, was watching how Gascoigne would manage to mount the steed of evil. It refused to let him get on at first, although he spoke to it and tried to coax it; but in a frightened manner it went back and back till it was stopped by the farmyard wall.

Then he did get into the saddle, and—everyone expected a plunge—a kick or two—a fight of some sort for mastery!

To the astonishment of them all, Gascoigne desired the horse to go on; and it obediently went. Quietly he rode out along with the others: quietly on and on they rode.

"I declare," uttered Jack, at last breaking the watching silence of the rest, "I never saw such a thing in my life; one would think you had mesmerised the beast. There never was anyone who had such a curious way of making all horses quiet. What is it? Have you a charm?"

To which Gascoigne, never boastful, answered also with some surprise:

"Really it is more than I understand myself. Perhaps, after all, the poor brute exhausted all his energies in fighting you, Lee; so that it is thanks to your enduring the worst of his misbehaviour that I have got the best of him."

Which kindly fiction, though it deceived nobody, not even the Smiler, made him nevertheless more pleased with himself; as such good-natured speeches do salve one's bruised self-love.

CHAPTER II.

"'Tis that fair time of year,
Lady mine!
When stately Guinevere,
In her sea-green robe and hood,
Went a-riding through the wood,
Lady mine!

And as the Queen did ride,
Lady mine!
Sir Lancelot at her side
Laughed and chatted, bending over,
Half her friend and all her lover,—
Lady mine!"

HOT was that June afternoon as they rode.

The hedgerows, which of late had been bedded underneath with blue-bells and red

campion—azure and rose intermingling in glorious daring of colour—were now all adorned in white as for the bridal of summer,

> "And in the warm hedge grew lush eglantine,
> Green cow-bind and the moonlight-coloured May."

White lay the dust below; snowy gleamed the great ox-eyes from the banks; creamily curved the tendrils of honeysuckle through the tangled brake; and the bindweed, tenderly clinging to every hold, offered its milk-white cup to the air and sun, that had long since drained it of dew.

Hot it was; but not too hot to be pleasant.

Only enough so to make them all gladly leave the high-road, to follow a path up a wooded glen by the side of a trout-river—gleaming dark and cool, where the broad oak branches overshadowed it, and the fish, like sprites, went darting to and fro—or brawling merrily over rocks in the open,

where the woods receded and left bracken patches, or a coppice of oak scrub.

"When shaws beene sheene, and shradds full fayre,
And leaves both large and longe,
Itt is merrye walking in the fayre forrèst
To heare the small birdes songe."

"Oh, how lovely this is!" cried Daisy, who was used to only the sleepy, wide, flat pastures, and solemn standard elms around her own home, Elm Hall.

"Yes, is it not? I come here very often," answered Gascoigne, who was now beside her again.

"Those wretched little beggars of fish are not the length of my finger," said Jack, who was a sportsman to his very soul, and looked on all scenery with the eyes of a good shot and an ardent angler.

"How these flies do torment one's horse here," lamented poor Lee, last of all, far down the woodpath.

Pity for his feelings prevented the rest from enjoying themselves, or, at least, expressing their enjoyment as much as they otherwise might. Although soon, when they saw, down among dark rocks, a kingfisher, a flash of living blue, Daisy could not contain herself; and, to Gascoigne's surprise, cried out with ecstatic delight.

"It does one good to see how you are enjoying yourself; to see how happy you look," he said; turning to smile at her with such a kindly expression, nay, such an admiring, friendly one, that Daisy forgot all about their previous misunderstandings, and felt that, after all—she did like him a little.

"Oh, this horse is such a darling! Who could help being happy on his back?" she murmured, bending sidewards in a supple way, so that poor Lee should not hear and be further vexed. "And one's spirits go

up so high again after being low; like see-saw. I was *so* wretchedly uncomfortable before! and now I am as happy as happy can be. Don't you think all our troubles are over for the day?"

"Don't halloo till we're out of the wood! We must leave it soon, and ford the river down at that gravelly bend you see below the wooded cliff; and my horse may be like other evil spirits, unwilling to cross running water."

"I believe *you* could make him go anywhere."

With which flattering tribute, that hit its mark, and did very much please Captain Gascoigne's conceit, to judge by his gratified smile, they reached the ford.

Gascoigne insisted on Daisy's going over first in safety, under Jack's care. But his own steed, as his little companion had prophesied, splashed through the clear stream

with no more added liveliness than just made his rider show to advantage.

So Daisy thought, watching him from the bank, and was only roused from so doing by hearing Jack exclaim :—

"Why, Lee! Poor Lee! By Jove, the mare is lying down with him!!"

Too true!

That most misguided (in all senses) of animals, having entered the water as reluctantly as a decrepit bather, seemed, when half way across, to find it cool and refreshing about her old fetlocks. Switching her tail to get rid of the flies, she stood still. The Smiler, whose good feelings had been so grossly misunderstood by the black horse, now again felt his better self returning; and kindly allowed her thus to rest.

Before he knew what she was about, even as Jack's warning cry was still ringing in the air, she had abused his permission by

lying down and rolling luxuriously in the water: while what became of him it would be hard indeed to say!

Amidst the outcries of sympathy, advice, and gibing, Daisy's irrepressible tinkle of soft laughter, and the louder, more unfeeling mirth of the rest—soused—dripping, in a rage for once in his life—the saddened Smiler reached the bank.

"You look, for all the world, like a water-rat," bellowed Jack.

Gascoigne, on the other hand, jumped off to assure himself that their comrade was not hurt; then advised him to get dried at a water-bailiff's cottage not far from the path, where, also, his saddle-girths might be seen to—one being burst.

Poor Lee gallantly declared he did not mind the wetting, but the saddle was another matter! He looked so doleful over the sorry figure he cut, dragging his drip-

ping Rosinante by the bridle, whilst watering the ground himself at every step, and forlornly striving still to look gay, that Jack, in pure pity, volunteered to go with him.

"You will take care of my sister, if you don't much mind? I'll follow you up as soon as ever I can," he said to Gascoigne.

Captain Gascoigne, with a most cheerful expression, seemed to think he would *not* mind the trouble very much.

Thus, an hour later, having climbed up from the glen by a pleasant ascending path, Daisy and Gascoigne, alone together, were having a rare gallop over the moorland above.

Galloper Down was a grand place for a gallop! when once you got up to it. Turf springy, and soft as velvet, but few boulders or gorse-bushes; a glorious view over three shires, and, on this day, sun and wind at

their kindliest. The sun's glory made life seem a pure delight; its heat just enough tempered to warm the moorland, and extract a thousand subtle small scents. There was a strong, fresh wind, that sent the blood dancing through the veins, yet only enough to fan a lady's cheek to coolness, as they pull up at last, and stand and look.

"Is it not grand up here?" exclaimed Gascoigne, looking away over the far expanse below them; champaign and glens; winding streams, and misty, distant, dotted hamlets; and the broad, blue sky, in which the clouds did seem

"The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest."

"I love seeing so far away as this, do not you? One's thoughts always seem to be cramped, if the horizon is shut in too nearly by hills. With a wide prospect, even if one were chained still to one spot, Prometheus-

like, still the mind would seem free. Do you not feel the same?"

He had grown very familiar with Daisy during the last hour. But why expect her to agree with him in all things, as he as plainly did?

She, however, answered timidly, with such deep respect for his lightest opinion, that disagreement seemed venturous—although she, too, had positively quite forgotten till now to be at all afraid of her companion; the rapid pace at which they had been riding, side by side, having shaken her out of self-consciousness—

"I am afraid my taste is not for such wide scenery, in which one seems to have *no frame* to the picture. Is not this more a panorama?" she timidly hazarded. "But I do love trout-streams and wooded glens, like the one behind us; then, to be perfect, one little peep, I think, into far-away;

just one little peep, that I should like to take at times only, when one felt a wish to see out into the great world. Then it would be like coming into snug home again to turn back, and see the woods all round me."

"Why, then, you should see my house in Southshire, where the woods come down to the water's edge; and there is a river that runs through our place, where, in hot summer weather, a poor little sister of mine, now dead, used to sit. There are big trees all round, and delightful rocks in the middle of the river, that you can easily reach, and between the branches there is a peep—just such as you would like—of the sea."

"How strange!" ejaculated Daisy, staring up at him with parted lips. "Why! that reminds me so exactly of a spot somewhere in the south I used to be told of long ago, when I was quite a child, by——"

"By whom?"

A simple question, surely. Yet Miss Daisy blushed visibly, and, striving to hide that, stooped to pat the glossy neck of the good bay horse that carried her.

"Oh, it does not matter. Some one I have never seen since I was quite little. It would not interest you at all to know who it was."

"What a mysterious little lady you are!" returned Gascoigne, lightly; since no one could really associate much mystery with Miss Dimity's rosebud face. "One day you wish to explain to me something most particularly; and, when it comes to the point, nothing will induce you to do so. And now you unkindly refuse to reveal the identity of somebody who talked to you when you were *quite* little."

"You know you would not really care to know," cried Daisy, gaining courage. "He

was a big boy, and I was ever so much younger; and he used to tell me about a glen he knew, that I would like to play in. There were rocks, too; and a river; and the sea; and a boat-house, like an arbour, beside a pool. Oh, I suppose there may be dozens of such places in England!"

"Curious!—There is a pretty boat-house on our river, too, close by the spot I spoke of," said Gascoigne. "Why, no one could have told you of my favourite haunt? But how on earth do you remember so well a description told you some years ago?"

"Oh, here is Jack coming!"—with a tone of more joy than his appearance ten minutes ago would have aroused, although so well-beloved.

And thus Gascoigne got no answer to his questions.

Jack related that, having seen his friend dried and consoled, the latter had decided

on returning on foot to Marstown high-road, where a 'bus would pick him up; means having been found to send the mare back to her owner tied to a cart's tail, with messages of ignominy.

Their minds set free, the remaining three now resolved to enjoy themselves for the rest of the sunny evening, without thought of time. They had one more most noble canter, all the way back over Galloper Down. The sunset was a sight of glory as they turned at last homewards; and two of them at least had not only eyes to see, but could find words to admire it. (As many people think they cannot, whether from false shyness, or want of wont, or slothfulness of thought.)

But poor Jack, indeed! would have required to shout, had he wished to impart to the others any analysis of the delicate pleasure or tenderly sensuous, pantheistic

joy aroused within *his* mind by the beauty of earth preparing to sleep, while the skies were flushed and flooded with gorgeous colour as the sun ever sank.

For the bridle-path homewards, through the darkening glen, only allowed of two riding abreast; and, for civility's sake, he could not ride beside his sister. Thus Daisy and Gascoigne were again together; virtually alone so far as interchange of ideas went, and they seemed to have more than even during afternoon in common.

Except in one new respect. Gascoigne had begun to look at Daisy somewhat frequently; and that with an expression so very like unwitting admiration that she, not being able to follow or understand him there, at such moments looked down—or would begin patting the brave "Bay Curtal" she rode on, and making very much of him.

"And as they rode along,
Lady mine!
The throstle gave them song,
And the buds peeped through the grass
To see youth and beauty pass,
Lady mine!"

"And when are we to meet again, Miss Dimity?" he presently asked, although no reference had been previously made to their parting.

"Oh! we shall see you on Sunday," she brightly replied. "For the Coxes want to take me to garrison chapel; they say it is quite my duty to see the service there. And I should like to see Jack in uniform; he never would put it on for us, except the very first time" (glancing back, with admiration more open and quite equal to that lately shown by Gascoigne towards herself, at the snub-nose and pleasantly ugly young countenance of her eldest brother).

Gascoigne smiled broadly; and answered,

in a tone of almost taking her part against some invisible detractor,

"Yes—of course it is only natural you should like to see any of the military sights here that are unusual; quite so! But I do not believe you would care for them so exclusively as some of the Marstown young ladies seem to do, all the same. No, I cannot think you would," this last in a sort of flattering meditation. Then waking up again, rather satirically, "But there is one custom here on Sunday evenings I do not admire; it is the same in many garrison towns, though. That is the way in which some young ladies make arrangements with their officer acquaintances to go to church together, and come back to supper—and flirtation. It is too suggestive of Mary Ann's 'Sunday out,' and her young man coming back for surreptitious cold meat. Don't you think so? I am sure you agree with me."

How very certain Captain Gascoigne seemed to be, after this day's ride, that Daisy agreed with him in most things!

CHAPTER III.

"Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower,
Thou's met me in an evil hour."

A LETTER for Miss Dimity.

It was lying on her dressing-table, and had come by the evening post.

It was not from Elm Hall: the first glance recognized that with disappointment, and few other correspondents in the land had Daisy. Taking it up to dally with her curiosity, as so many of us idly like to do, she saw it bore only the Marstown postmark. It was in one of the mean, narrow envelopes, too, nobody now likes; and was addressed in a vile scrawl, something be-

tween a child's roundhand and the malicious flourish that generally adorns a bill.

But Daisy did not owe a penny in the town; had bought nothing except that unlucky blue ribbon. Opening it, therefore, in happy carelessness, soon her blue eyes grew wide and quite scared-looking as she read the following threatening epistle:

"DEAR MISS *Innocent* (?) DIMITY,

"This is to let you know, though you pretend to be so very demure, as if butter would not melt in your mouth (and so young, forsooth!) that such sham won't go down in Marstown.

You think to catch Smiler Lee,
As anyone with an eye can see.

But be *warned*, for with all your pretences, that impose upon *no one*, of being so much finer than other girls *far* better born and bred, and so shy (or sly), it is sour grapes.

He is too old a bird to be caught with your chaff; and soon you will find yourself the laughing-stock of the town. So be warned by a friend, and give up running, as you do, after gentlemen.

"Fie, naughty little Miss Dimity! You that pretend to be so very proper!

"This is from one who advises you for your *own* good."

Daisy could have put down her head and cried.

She was so shocked, so surprised and hurt. For in her own heart she *knew* she had tried to behave with only pleasant feeling and kindliness to all the Marstown people whom she had met; had tried to speak ill of none; had tried to think well of them all—a harder task.

Pride and astonishment at first kept back her tears. But then, like a wronged child,

her rosebud face puckered curiously, some salt drops had to be winked away from her eyes, till at last, with a sense of finding some small comfort *there*, she fairly hid her face in her handkerchief.

Only a few seconds, however.

Privacy was a rare treat in the Cox household; they considered it none. They were among those female beings who keep running in and out of each other's private apartments all day, even your bed-rooms not being considered by them the special sanctum you wish them to be regarded. What are you doing, sewing, writing a letter, curling your front hair? they cry. And very probably they either stand and gaze at you (in a maddening way); or else they calmly sit down for a chat, and are offended at any hint of being turned out.

A quick knock came at Daisy's door.

"What! are you changing your dress?"

came through the keyhole in Birdie's voice; and Pussy and Fuzzy, from the background of the landing, could be heard inquiring,

"Shall we all come in and help you; or shall we wait outside here for you? Do be quick, there's a dear!"

Poor Daisy had only just time to hide her letter guiltily, before Pussy begged her way in with caresses, for she was less easily refused than the rest,

Daisy hurried all the sooner downstairs, being clamoured for by the other girls.

"Ah! there you are—at last. Your brother has gone to wash his hands in papa's dressing-room." (Jack had been, as usual, impressed for "high tea.") "Sh——! Is the door shut? Now quick, Pet, we have got something to read to you. Your brother would be wild if he knew we had got a copy."

And one of the girls hereupon produced

some sheets of note-paper, covered apparently with poetry.

"I got it from Mr. Jones. I had to coax him so tremendously for it. And I had to promise to tell NO ONE who gave it to me," pursued Pussy, with eminent self-satisfaction and remarkable faithfulness of trust.

"Can't you tell her first *what* it is?" struck in Fuzzy.

"It is poetry upon all the officers and regiments in Marstown. A copy was sent to each of them, and no one can guess who wrote it. Such fun! Why, some of them think we did, I believe. All we wish is that we were clever enough" (regretfully).

"O-h! So it is anonymous?" slowly asked Daisy, in a disapproving voice; with a sudden cooling of any future admiration of the mysterious poetic effusion.

"Of course it is. Some of the girls in Marstown must have written it, but no one

would be such a fool as to put her name to it."

Hereupon, Fuzzy began what was plainly a parody on the battle of Ivry, "And thou, Marstown, our own Marstown," being substituted for the city of Rochelle; while it was neatly hinted that, although one regiment must soon leave (videlicet, that of Major Hodge and Mr. Jones), yet another would naturally replace it, when

"Again shall rapture light the eyes of Marstown's mourning daughters."

It proceeded to observe further,

"Oh! how our hearts were beating, when on the last field-day
We saw your gallant regiment drawn out in long array,
With all their glorious officers, who amongst men have no peers."

"Hum!" from little Miss Dimity. (She admired red-coats very much dutifully, but she was not quite certain of *that*. There

could not be a Jack, or a—no—well, a Jack just! in every regiment; and Major Hodge and Mr. Jones were woful examples of how uninteresting to her even martial heroes could be who had not the distinguished advantage of being associated with Lieutenant Dimity.) Fuzzy unheedingly proceeded,

"And there's nothing *we* think like infantry; give us those that here is."

(An admirable rhyme to peers. But Daisy trusted her Jack would never be given over to be torn in pieces by the loving hands of the Marstown young ladies.)

"There rode our darling O'Donoghue, the handsomest in the land,
And dark-haired Jones marched in the midst, his sword well in his hand."

(Military knowledge somewhat inaccurate there, as Fuzzy remarked.) While the ditty went on to tell how Colonel Dunn (Jack's colonel), had come to marshal them

"In all his uniform dressed,
With a helmet like a policeman *('s?)* upon his gallant crest;
He looked upon us ladies and a tear was in his eye,
He looked upon his soldiers and his glance was stern and high."

The metre here shifted unaccountably to a striking imitation of Goldsmith's epitaph on Garrick.

"Here comes Captain Gascoigne, describe me who can,
An abridgment of all that is pleasant in man."

"An abridgment! Why, he is much taller than most men!" exclaimed Daisy, rather indignantly, giving outward expression to her feelings for the first time. But Fuzzy paid small heed to this interpolation.

"Oh! who cares what abridgment means? One word does as well as another. I daresay whoever wrote it didn't know what it meant either."

"When we meet him, he's all that is good, kind, and civil,
But it's said that he hates us poor girls like the d—!"

Daisy thought that last vulgar, especially as applied to a man like her brother's friend, who was—well, just a *gentleman!* But as the Cox girls tittered amazingly over it, and seemed to find a most especial relish therein, she merely ventured to remark, in a cool, high tone,

"Well, that cannot be true, at all events. Why, even since I came I have met Captain Gascoigne several times, and he made himself very pleasant."

A quick look was interchanged between the sisters.

"Well, yes, dear; you have—because he likes very much coming to *us*," answered Pussy, very softly, but with clear emphasis. "But he goes out so little in Marstown society that, of course, the other girls are deadly jealous."

Fuzzy looked queerly upon this at her gentle sister, but steadily read on—

"And so we don't know him very well, though we'd
like to know him more.
And also his young friend Dimity, with his voice
like a lion's roar;
They call him the British Lion, for his growl is
worse than his bite.
If we didn't know what a duck he is, he'd put us
poor things in a fright."

The rhymester here, having failed to get a lead from any divine poet, was plainly deteriorating. Even the praise of Jack could not lessen Miss Daisy Dimity's utter secret contempt. Fancy calling her manly brother a *duck!*

The versification grew from worse to worse.

"Who now comes on but Major Hodge,
Oh, do not say that rhymes with podge!
He's a terrible flirt;
Oh, what a funny man is Hodge!"

With quite an added impetus of inspiration, the writer now seemed to rush in verse at Mr. Lee.

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"Next is dear little Smiler,
That arrant beguiler,
So larky and gay,
He wheedles away
The hearts of too many a lass,
Alas!
Like dancing with him there's no joy in life
Half so SPLENDID, unless he should say, Be my wife!"

"Hullo! So you young ladies have got hold of that farrago of nonsense, have you?" said Jack's voice behind the group, sounding very gruffly unflattering as to their occupation.

The Cox girls started with tittering outcries, feeling caught.

"How you got it is more than I know," went on the young man, with a rather severe eye; "but I hope that none of *our* fellows were so weak——"

"Oh, dear, no; certainly not! None of your regiment were good-natured enough to do such a thing as gratify a simple request of us, young ladies, to see it," interrupted

Pussy, acidly. "Oh, *dear*, no; you may set your mind quite at rest."

"Glad to hear it," coolly responded Jack; who found Pussy's temper not nearly so sweet since he had begun to pay more undivided attentions to her sister. "When the THING was sent to our mess, I would have liked it to be burnt—and no more notice taken. But some of the others were rather angry, and inclined to retaliate. If we had written our ideas of the Marstown young ladies, and sent it round, they might not have liked seeing themselves described either. Lee was very nearly doing it; but Captain Gascoigne persuaded him not. He said it would be rather ungentlemanlike."

The Cox girls looked dubious at that; and inclined to regret that their feelings had been treated with so much consideration. Daisy's eyes brightened for the first time since they had been vexed half an

hour ago. She did not like to say she thought the verses vulgar, but she did say, softly,

"I think that was very nice of Captain Gascoigne."

But no one heard her except Jack, who looked upon her with a brotherly eye, and said aside, observingly,

"Little one, you're tired. You've got a headache—I can see it by your face."

The Cox girls did not heed this by-play; they were occupied in exclaiming against Jack's strictures, and declaiming their contrary opinions. Where was the harm, they wished to know, of sending some verses of poetry to the officers of a regiment. They could see none. Perhaps *the officers* could see harm in it; but, thank goodness! they (the Misses Cox) had more innocent minds.

"Yes; 'to the pure all things are pure,'" observed Pussy, demurely, and folded her

hands over each other in a way that made Jack think suddenly what a specimen of a pharisaical, mittened old maid she might become with years—in spite of her different behaviour now.

"Mind you! we had nothing to do with this. If we had, I shouldn't speak out as I do," declared Fuzzy, with honest downrightness. "But considering that, in other ways, we have had some fun with other regiments, one likes to stand up for oneself, Mr. Dimity. Now, we sent mock proposals, last Valentine's Day, to some of the officers in—in the Queen's Own Freebooters (Major Hodge's regiment), and they thought it great sport! I would never sign the name of another girl to them—that is *low!* One girl did that by me, at the same time; and, if I could be sure who it was, I'd never forgive her. We never put names."

By Fuzzy's heightened colour, it was

clear to everyone that her supposed declaration had been sent to Major Hodge. Daisy looked across at her with a very kindly fellow-feeling. Jack felt indignant that the recipient of that letter had ever let out the secret; and with difficulty refrained from declaring so. He gave some vent to his opinion, nevertheless, by the remark—

"Of all the low-minded, cowardly, and contemptible people in this world (and there are lots of them!), in my opinion, those that send anonymous letters are the worst curs."

Saying which, he put his hands in his pockets, a reprehensible trick; and got up to stare at nothing, out of the window, which apparently relieved his mind.

"Jack dear," whispered his little sister, passing her arm through his, and putting a question with an air of lightness, "if you were ever to get an anonymous letter,

what should you think it best to do?"

"Do, child! I'd put it straight in the fire, and never tell living soul I had even seen it. Why! bless you, the very object of the persons who can send such things is to vex you. Nobody should ever know I was annoyed by them."

Daisy took her resolution.

Jack had spoken, and, without knowing it, advised her; and he was nearly always right. Nevertheless, her heart was rather heavy with such a secret lying upon it, and no sister Polly to tell it to. (For Jack's counsel of secrecy could not have applied to *her*.)

So, although she bravely tried not to mind, and believed she did not mind, that *thing* upstairs, still Jack, by-and-by, said again in his gruffest peremptory tone—

"You've got a headache, I know. Mrs. Cox, do order this obstinate girl to her bed."

Upon which Daisy was so entreated; and went dutifully; and with secret thankfulness. Before lying down she burnt the scurrilous little note—holding it, before it was shrivelled, in the candle, as she might something of the vermin tribe.

That done, her thoughts became happier, reverting to late pleasant scenes; and soon her dreams were all of gurgling, rushing waters, bright sunshine, rocks, trees, and a gallop on Galloper Down, mingled in delightful confusion.

CHAPTER IV.

"By robbing Peter he paid Paul, and hoped to catch larks if ever the heavens should fall."

WHEN Daisy was taken by the Coxes, on Sunday, to the garrison-chapel, she felt even more shy than she had ever done since she came to Marstown.

To begin with, they had passed by the barrack-gates, and seen a mass of scarlet drawn up, and heard the clash of a military band playing.

There was really no earthly reason in that why she should feel shy, although unused to such sounds and sights, since, at Elm Hall, their way to church lay through

pastoral, green meadows. But shyness, like other female qualities, does not go by reasoning; and poor Daisy felt at such times as if everything new, even the consciousness of her new bonnet, made her feel shy.

They took the places assigned them in the unpretending little chapel, and presently a steady tramp, tramp! was heard nearing, and the soldiers came in by one door. Daisy did not know any correct terms of ecclesiastical architecture, so she described it, when writing to Polly, as the "back door."

Presently, most of the officers came filing in one after another by the "front door," as she naturally called it, though it was the smallest, and at one side. Daisy thought they all looked—that is to say she knew Jack looked—as if they had all got up earlier than they wanted to, and had bolted their breakfasts, and still felt in something

of a hurry, as they followed at each other's heels, clothed hotly and gloriously in scarlet and gold, on that stifling July morning; carrying their swords with an expression of countenance that an imaginative observer might have fancied to mean: We are all righteously conscious that we would go to church if we were left to ourselves; but it is quite another thing, and tends to aggravation, to be OBLIGED to come!

To Miss Dimity's horror most of them, the bachelors, at least, all had seats just behind their party. And she now felt an inward horrible conviction that one of her hair-pins was sticking out!

She struggled righteously within herself to say her prayers, and never mind who was behind her, or what was wrong with her back plaits. But the feeling was still lurking that if Jack saw it (and he had lynx

eyes for such superfluities in her attire!) how he would growl at her later, brother-like!

No, it did not in the least matter that she had seen Mr. Lee pass up the aisle, looking as jauntily gay as a pocket edition of Mars. Nor yet that Captain Gascoigne also had gone by, looking like—well, exactly like his usual quiet self—she minded none but Jack.

At last, after ten minutes of troubled agony, summoning up her courage, she stole up one hand, gave a stealthy, desperate push to that wretched hair-pin; and then, thank goodness, settled down to her devotions—happy.

The band that played, instead of a mere harmonium, such as their wheezy one at Elm Hall, impressed her very much; the number of men's voices joining in the singing she thought had a fine effect.

By ill-luck, however, when the psalms

were almost over, who should come, hot and in haste, fussily ushering her whole party into church, but Mrs. Brandiston-Browne, escorted by Mr. Higginbotham. And the latter was shown into the seat beside Daisy.

It was too provoking.

Poor little girl, she could only attend devoutly to the service, with the latent feeling that afterwards she should tax Jack severely with having smiled (behind her back), and, if he owned the soft impeachment, scold him well for allowing his thoughts thus to stray. Meanwhile Mrs. Browne's Blessing goggled his eyes at her, as if blankly unaware that anything more human of his acquaintance than a milliner's dummy sat beside him.

Beyond Daisy again were Fuzzy and Birdie; both equally distracting.

For the latter persisted in singing, al-

though out of church no one had ever heard her attempt such a flight. She seemed to have an edifying belief that shrill false notes added to her own sense of devotion; if so, it was only gained by subtracting from that of others. Fuzzy took the responses under *her* especial wing, and, perhaps feeling the martial atmosphere of the surroundings, fired them off with a sharp brevity most admirable to hear—if only she had not frequently, with perfect composure, rattled out the wrong ones.

Still even this, with patience and perseverance of attention, could be overlooked. They had an admirable ten minutes' sermon from the military chaplain, containing two jokes, and the remainder common sense.

And now came round the collection-plates.

A good deal of spur and sword jingling could be heard behind Daisy's head; in-

distinct murmurs of "Lend me" were breathed. Nevertheless, sound, big-silvered jingles showed that, if men do not give in as many little charities as the softer sex, they give more when they do give.

Mrs. Brandiston-Browne was evidently surreptitiously feeling the milled edges of the small coins in her purse, in fear that she might carelessly give away a fourpenny piece when she had meant to bestow a threepenny one. Mrs. Cox smiled with superior elegance; she had seen to that at home.

But now it came to the turn of Mrs. Browne's Blessing.

So slowly that the eyes of all in the chapel could not but turn upon him, that ambiguous young man drew out a shilling, looked at it dubiously, then muttered something to the collector.

The latter stared aghast.

But Mr. Higginbotham, with an air of business deliberation, held his shilling tight in the fingers of one hand, while with the other hand he began sorting out ninepence —in base exchange! Threepence and threepence made sixpence; then in coppers he sifted out sevenpence, eightpence. A halt of a second—a doubting gaze—"with earnest eyes and round unthinking face"—then one last poke, and out came, with an air of triumph, the crowning penny!

Down he chucked his shilling.

All were at first almost too breathlessly interested and astonished to do more than keep their mouths metaphorically open.

The young man, calmly rolling his prominent eyes, handed the plate to Daisy. While he still held it, however, Mrs. Browne, who

had been endeavouring, during all the time of this mercantile transaction, to pluck the sleeve of the future baronet (two lives removed), whispering, agonisedly, "Don't, John; give it, John!" only unhappily succeeded in reaching the goal of her efforts now. At this supreme moment, therefore, her final pluck gave the Blessing's arm such a shake that, with a ring and a rattle, away flew the coins, great and small, in a perfect largesse! and went rolling into every imaginable, most un-get-at-able cranny.

In a trice Mr. Higginbotham relinquished his hold of the collection-plate; and there stood poor Daisy, who held the other side of it, "blushing like the morn," whilst a sort of internal spasm seemed to afflict all those adjacent, and the back benches were no doubt equally stricken with convulsions of suppressed mirth.

"The youths looked aside—to laugh there were a sin,
And the maidens' lips trembled from smiles shut within."

What a situation for an unsophisticated country damozel!

CHAPTER V.

"Of all the days that's in the week
I dearly love but one day,
And that's the day that comes between
A Saturday and Monday.
For then I'm dressed all in my best
To walk abroad with Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
And she lives in our alley."

"YOU did that very well indeed, Daisy! capitally; only don't blush so much another time, when you get more used to knocking the money down."

This was from Jack, in a voice of deep, inward enjoyment.

It was after church; and all Marstown then repaired to the Mall, or rather a part

of it nick-named Prayer-book Row. Here the Cox party, after meekly walking up and down some time after chapel—looking as if waiting for nobody—had been joined by Mr. Lee and Mr. Dimity, who had got out of their uniform and into ordinary clothes with amazing quickness.

"I blushed for you, and for your unbecoming conduct in church," retorted Daisy, her spirit roused.

"Blushed for us!" struck in Smiler Lee, taking the kind office as meant for himself, too, with pleasant impudence. "You did it very nicely, then, Miss Dimity. Thank you. We'll always come to you, now, to have it done for us by substitute—ho, ho, ho!" (Then in an aside.) "Excuse my laughing—do, please; but if you only knew how becoming it is when you blush—just *the* right amount of colour, and your eyes light up——"

"Good morning, Miss Dimity," said Gascoigne at that moment, having just joined the group. "I hope you will forgive me for being also among the ill-behaved persons you are so severely condemning. But really," with a broad smile, despite himself, that seemed to suffuse his whole honest face with a flush of suppressed amusement—"really you can have no idea what a picture of injured innocence you made! Everyone could see it was not your fault; but the indignant reproach with which you looked at that unfortunate young man was irresistible."

"Hallo! Have *you* come out to promenade Prayer-book Row?" exclaimed Lee, addressing Captain Gascoigne with an air of (slightly assumed) infinite surprise, yet of gay welcome to both their party and the Row. "That is something new. I thought you always patronised what I call the

Hermit's Walk over there," pointing to a somewhat deserted and quieter portion of the Mall, "and that you looked down on us frivolous people here."

"He! Why, he often comes here with me," quickly interposed Jack, making that somewhat loose assertion with some inward reason (so it seemed to Daisy, who knew him well) as if not wishing his friend's appearance there to be considered singular.

The Smiler—who was really the best-hearted fellow in the world—rapidly conquered his momentary vexation at seeing the friend who had so much outshone him during their memorable ride, again quietly taking up the place beside Daisy's side which had hitherto been indisputably his (the Smiler's).

He did remain indeed for a few minutes longer on Daisy's other side, making lively sallies to engage her attention on himself.

But, on the other hand, Gascoigne had a steady perseverance that told in the long run; besides, his conversation required answering, while his gay rival's only needed applause or laughter.

And also—this he could not guess—the little damsel between them was tormenting herself with the thought that, among the many Marstown young ladies continually passing and re-passing them in kaleidoscopic groups, might probably be the very one who had written *that* letter. Therefore—thinking her dignity required her to show in public that she was not "running after" Mr. Smiler Lee—with perfect innocence of purpose, Miss Daisy made it palpable to the world for some time that the young man was rather a courtier-in-waiting upon her sovereign pleasure.

Thus she and Gascoigne were soon left to each other's society.

"And how did you like the service this morning? I remember you were looking forward to it," he simply asked; but in a way that made his companion feel quite gratified at his having remembered her idle chat.

"After all, it doesn't seem as if I had been in church at all," she confided in reply, with quite a melancholy tone. "Between that dreadful young man, and Mrs. Browne in front always saying her prayers fully six seconds behind everyone else; and—and some other things."

"I know; I could hear the other things," smiled Gascoigne, glancing significantly at the Misses Cox. "But don't you think that, if one were really devout, we would not be aware of these small distractions?"

"Perhaps not. No. You always put things in the right light," dismally. (What sufficient experience had Daisy, by the way,

as to Captain Gascoigne's impartiality of judgment?) "But, you see, it was all so new to me: so very different from going to church at home. May not that be a little the reason why?"

"Very much so, I should say. It is a reason *I* can't plead for my frequently wandering thoughts. Well; tell me, what is your church near Elm Hall (isn't that the name?) like."

Whereupon Daisy, with loving minuteness, described that old, white-washed Saxon church; as it was proudly claimed to be, on the strength of a bit of almost defaced carving on one stone over the porch. How it nestled among its elms; and the rooks cawed around it; and the farmers' wives clattered to it in pattens through winter-weather, or strolled thither through the wide, flat pastures in summer. How her father, as squire, had a high, black-oak pew

in the dusty chancel, where he fell asleep, and the preacher was none the wiser—although declaiming from the pulpit against some of the farmers, who apparently came there to snore, tired with the week's labour.

"And if they do, Captain Gascoigne, is it much wonder? for the sermon is all text, said over and over again. Jack counted it once, when he was home last, up to one hundred and sixty-six times. Then, just as you really think it is done with, our vicar says, 'Dear friends, perhaps you would like to hear my text *once more*.'"

Thereupon Gascoigne laughed; and immediately began describing his church at home; not quite so old (being merely Norman) as that at Elm Hall, but equally dusty, and delightfully uneven, irregular, and leaning upon ivy-hid, more modern buttresses.

How the monumental brasses of his fore-

fathers upon the floor showed their crusading exploits, by one having his ankles crossed, to denote a single, insignificant expedition to the Holy Land; while another, with his crossed higher, showed his conscience had rejoiced in two; but the last, the flower of the family's knights, proudly lay with his crossed at the knee; for his campaigns against Mahomed and the Saracens had been three.

> "The knight's bones are dust,
> And his good sword rust;
> His soul is with the saints, I trust."

But now their pleasant walk and talk were interrupted gently by Mrs. Cox; who, using—it was remarkable—her young guest's Christian name for the first time, as if to show both maternal interest and a sort of proprietorship in her before Gascoigne, said,

"Daisy, my dear (I *beg* your pardon for

interrupting you, Captain Gascoigne), let me have the pleasure of introducing your brother's colonel to you. Colonel Dunn, this is *my* little guest, Miss Dimity."

Colonel Dunn was what appeared to Daisy a charming old man; with the frostiest of hair, the rosiest of faces, and the warmest of manners. (She was wrong as to his supposed venerable age, being misled by his white hair, but quite right as to his delightful other qualities.) Young Dimity's pleased look told that much, when his colonel welcomed Daisy most paternally as the sister of one of "his boys." Being a widower, he had two little lads with him, who were more literally "his boys;" but only apportionately more so as to the affection he seemed to shed over all, young or old, small and great, that were brought near to him in life. He talked as if he were always in a high wind; one that blew

laden with health and vigour, but in which it was hard to make his voice heard.

After saying everything pleasant he could think of, as to Daisy's stay in Marstown, the old colonel took his leave—having so many other pleasant greetings to give everybody else, that he seemed continually in a gay hurry.

"Not fair, not fair to take up the time of such a charming young lady! There are too many younger men only waiting their opportunity, whom, I dare say, you would prefer very much to the society of an old one like me," he said, in adieu, waving his hand to Daisy; while his two little sons sprang to either side of him again, as if very glad he had left the ladies.

The story was current in Marstown that Mrs. Smeeth (whose classical knowledge lay open to suspicion) had been heard to say that the dear colonel with them two dar-

ling boys reminded her of a statoo she thought she had seen somewhere, or its picture.

"The Laocoon?" the Smiler had artfully suggested.

And Mrs. Smeeth, observing that very likely that was it, she was heard afterwards, in many Marstown gatherings, adopting the amendment, to his wicked joy.

Now, although Colonel Dunn had so thoughtfully resigned his claims upon Daisy's attention, Mrs. Cox was resolved not to relinquish her own hold upon her charge.

Smiling urbanely at a lady near them, with a graceful inclination of her head, and laying her fingers lightly on Daisy's arm (who saw Gascoigne hovering near), she said, with gentle haste,

"My dear, my dear, you must be introduced to Mrs. Luxton—in your brother's regiment, you know."

Daisy was somewhat displeased, for the opportunity seemed ill-chosen, Mrs. Luxton being occupied with some one else; nevertheless she tried to feel as good-humoured as possible while being trotted forward—as if she were a cosset-lamb led by a blue ribbon—by Mrs. Cox.

Mrs. Luxton was a pretty young woman, with a frank manner, and a very merry light in her eyes.

The corners of those same black eyes now twinkled brightly as she cordially received the cosset-lamb; having perceived that victim's manner of approach.

"I hope we shall be great friends, Miss Dimity; your brother and I are tremendous friends, you must know," she said. "You are walking up and down, I see: perhaps you will take a turn with me, and Fred" (turning to her stout, amiable husband) "will be very glad of

the chance to chat with you, Mrs. Cox, I am sure."

Mrs. Cox, poor woman, murmured—"Ah!" with a slight catch of her breath. She gave one quickly furtive glance at her reproachful-eyed daughters. But she could not now prevent Daisy becoming more friendly with Mrs. Luxton than was judged expedient. The latter's frank honesty had dashed aside the pretty little cobweb she wanted to hold Daisy fast in, that the latter should not be dangerous in *any* quarter.

Up and down accordingly they paced together, and Daisy liked Mrs. Luxton very much indeed; she was so honest, amusing, and with a something about her more congenial than anyone whom Daisy had yet met in Marstown.

"You are a cousin of the Coxes, are you not?" Mrs. Luxton asked, but with some doubt in her voice.

"I?—Oh! no!" Daisy answered, with surprise; and, being a rather methodical small person, explained how that Mrs. Cox was only her *step*-mother's second-cousin once removed. But, lest Mrs. Luxton should imagine she was undervaluing the connection, she felt bound to describe also Mrs. Cox's great kindness in asking her, without ever having seen herself—nor even her step-mother for long years. She dwelt upon this unexpected goodness; not understanding why her companion's eyes twinkled with more fun than ever.

But her own eyes had been somewhat wandering.

It was only natural to wonder what Captain Gascoigne was doing; having remarked that he had not remained long with their party after being left to the blandishments of Pussy.

He had gone, as if weary of society in

Prayer-book Row, to the quiet Hermit's Walk at its upper end, where he had joined two other gentlemen of equally quiet appearance, in a saunter.

"Who is that you are looking at—Captain Gascoigne?" said Mrs. Luxton, suddenly. "He was with you a little while ago, was he not? I like him so much; indeed I want to speak to him myself."

So saying, she contrived to approach rather near the anchorites, as they strolled to the verge of the debatable land betwixt their haunts and Prayer-book Row, and signed to the gentle hermit in question.

Gascoigne came to her with his very most courteous manner. Daisy was beginning now to be able to conjugate the comparative degrees of his courtesy.

Mrs. Luxton told him she wished particularly to ask him to join a water-party she was getting up for the next week.

"Miss Dimity has just promised me to come too."

"If Mrs. Cox will do so," put in Daisy, dutifully.

Gascoigne would be very happy, looking really pleased; adding he had already accepted the same kind invitation from Captain Luxton.

"Dear me; did he ask you? How forgetful of me! Well, mind you do come Miss Dimity, don't trouble yourself about Mrs. Cox; she is sure to come. By-the-way, I must be hurrying homewards. But there—she is not five yards off! Do you mind joining her by yourself?—or *perhaps*——"

Captain Gascoigne asked, might he be permitted to act as Miss Dimity's escort for that enormous distance. With another twinkle of her mischievous eyes, Mrs. Luxton accordingly departed; sending her best adieux to Mrs. Cox.

The latter lady called, with some flurried sweetness as her stray chick approached in this strange guardianship,

"My dear, I am afraid, do you know, we *must* be going. I suppose, Captain Gascoigne, you will hardly be coming our way; so we must say good-bye," with great suavity.

"Let me accompany you as far as the entrance to the Mall, at all events," answered Gascoigne, with equal suavity but perfect calm; and went on beside Daisy accordingly.

"Who are those gentlemen you were with just now?" asked Daisy, with a tinge of jealousy.

"Those are two of my greatest friends —men in my regiment."

"Your greatest friends! But I thought—" with a glance at Jack, jealous now for that human piece of perfection.

Gascoigne laughed.

"Surely one may have several friends, Miss Dimity. Your brother is the friend who persuades me most to go out into society; those others are so pleasant, they rather tempt me to keep out of it—they are such delightful companions. *You* would like them very much; but, like many more of the very nicest men in the army, they don't care for teas, or even balls—if you can believe it."

"You need not think me a tee-totum," said Miss Daisy, quite pertly.

The Mall was entered by an old-fashioned turn-stile; and as Daisy and Gascoigne were going out after the others of her party, they stopped a moment to allow two little old ladies, the Miss Silverthornes, to come through.

Gascoigne took off his hat to the first, as a man might sure of a pleasant answering greeting, saying,

"How are you, Miss Silverthorne? I have not seen you for a long time."

But, to his evident amazement, the silver-haired, small spinster vouchsafed him no answer; and, with the gentlest of almost imperceptible bows, looked in the opposite direction with dainty dignity.

It was almost a cut; as near one as old-fashioned good breeding would allow her, at least.

"By—Jin-go!" murmured Gascoigne, in a low, astonished tone.

He reddened slightly all over his kind face, as he looked after Miss Silverthorne, with a slow surprise, and yet a pitying, hurt expression, as if a weak thing had repulsed his friendliness. Daisy felt most indignant for him. Then he turned.

The second old maid was now trying to pass through the stile. But she had not her elder's dignity, being plainly nervous or

else so weak that her fingers found it hard to move the heavy stile-bar. Gascoigne quickly stepped forward, and, pushing it with his strong hand, said—with what Daisy thought the perfection of a chivalrous air,

"I fear that I have offended your sister, Miss Silverthorne, though how I cannot imagine. Will you not be good enough to tell me what is the matter; since, although grieved at my fault, I really cannot guess *what it is!*"

"Oh! Gerald Gascoigne, not know . . . Oh! dear me, I *wish* Prudence had not gone on. This is very distressing!"

The tiny little woman looked up in his face tremulously; her hands likewise trembled so much that she dropped a reticule containing her prayer-books and handkerchief.

Again Gascoigne came to her succour, and picked them up; upon which her silver-grey

gown and her black lace shawl both now partook in her state of agitation.

"I most solemnly assure you, Miss Silverthorne, I do *not* know—there!"

"Oh, dear Gerald Gascoigne! . . . No, I mean only dear, dear! you know—*don't* say that! Such old friends of yours as a baby, and of your dear mother's, too, dear me; it is most distressing! . . . Still, young folk will be young folk, as I said to Prudence, only she said that to be *bombarded* with crumbs and things from a roof was *not* the conduct we should have expected from you."

"What! That was it?" cried Gascoigne, a light breaking upon him. "But, Miss Silverthorne, believe me, I had nothing to do with it. I——"

"Oh, Gerald Gascoigne! Say no more," and the tiny spinster held up a warning hand.

"Don't say another word. I will ask Prudence . . . not to mind it any more, but—*we saw you on the roof!*"

She rustled away to join her sister; who awaited her with an air of extreme solicitude, at the result of an interview requiring such courage on the part of the weaklier one.

Gascoigne, after looking utterly dumbfounded for a moment or two, then gravely said,

"There, Miss Dimity—you see how mistakes arise in this world. And they were old friends of my mother's, who have since lost most of their fortune. So I am all the more sorry for it."

Mrs. Cox was now found to be looking back, and waiting for Daisy on the other side of the turn-stile, with an air of more maternal fussiness than the latter's slight

delay quite warranted. The young people had thoughtlessly hurried on ahead, as she sweetly explained.

Gascoigne took his leave.

CHAPTER VI.

"Pack clouds away, and welcome day,
With night we banish sorrow;
Sweet air, blow soft; mount, larks, aloft,
To give my love good-morrow."

HOW different it was to wake at Elm Hall, at home, from waking in Marstown!

Why, at home, Daisy could always sleep with her window wide open (without fears of being warned that the policeman said it was tempting Providence, or tempting burglars). In the grey, cool dawns the sweet air at home used indeed to blow softly in, rustling her blinds. The larks in the lawn outside—that lawn on which the squire had

been watching the haymaking when our story opened—the larks were sure to have left their "watery nest" to mount aloft.

Then, by-and-by, the sun would be seen peeping over the summit of the tall elms at the foot of the lawn; though, if you rightly considered it, that was pretty high already. And then was the time for universal carolling and chirping.

> "Wake from thy nest, robin redbreast;
> Sing, birds, in every furrow;
> And from each hill let music shrill
> Give my fair love good-morrow."

And, after that, there would be farmyard noises, that in the early morning stillness could be easily heard, though the shrubberies did intervene: the lowing of cows, the morning quarrels and crows of poultry —most delightful of all that strangest-sounding of barndoor jubilees, telling that some of Miss Daisy's or Miss Polly's many

hens had contributed one penny farthing, or whatever else it might be, according to the market variations, to those young ladies' purses, by—laying an egg.

The Dimity girls undertook the whole important charge of the fowls at Elm Hall, so, as the squire jollily said, it was but fair they should have the profits. Thus he fed the fowls, and then paid for them, and was fleeced for every one of his own eggs, and bore it like a lamb; but then his little daughters—he knew—were most demurely righteous in studying the quotations of egg-prices in the *Royalshire Extractor*, so that they should not exact even the fraction of a farthing too much from him.

So, after a few cackles from the farm making themselves audible in spite of the rustling blinds, young Polly, who slept in a little pink and white nest beyond Daisy's little blue and white nest, would call to her

through the communicating door, which the sisters always left ajar the last thing at night, that they might talk more conveniently when they *ought* to have been asleep.

Or if, as more rarely happened, Daisy chanced to be first awake, she would rouse her sleeping sister in the spirit of old Herrick—

> "Get up, get up, for shame! The blooming morn
> Upon her wing presents the god unshorn.
> See how Aurora throws her fair,
> Fresh-quilted colours through the air!
> Get up, sweet slug-a-bed, and see
> The dew bespangling herb and tree."

So up these two matinal little girls would rise, and begin dressing in a violent hurry, as if afraid that otherwise they would certainly fall asleep. At least, Daisy always did so; by-and-by drowsiness would make her begin to dawdle, so that each time she softly called through the door to Polly, "What are you about?" it always cost her

a pang, for nimble Polly was sure to say, "Curling my hair," long before the tongs on her plump, slower elder's dressing-table had seen the heating flame. Wicked little girls, you may say, thus to touzle the soft, yellow locks Nature gave them; but then, theirs were just the faces to look so much prettier with this fashion.

But at last both would have dressed and prayed and been outside together, tripping over the dewy meadows or through the fresh-smelling gardens, where the roses were newly-washed and waking, while they heard

"The cuckoo, loud on some high lawn."

And they would say to each other, with always fresh pleasure, as if they had never said it before—"Is it not delightful to be out in the morning early?"

After this, there were a hundred little duties to perform; the eggs to be gathered;

the various clutches of chickens to be counted and fed; little clucking colonies to be shifted bodily, with their mother, house, and a square yard of noble, wired-in demesne, to fresh virgin soil.

Then came family prayers, read daily by the good squire in a hearty gabble which nobody could understand; since, never having been taught elocution in his youth, his manner of delivery was to take a tremendously long breath before every two or three verses: and then utter these with all the words tumbling on the top of each other. After which he always made a pause, and laid in a fresh stock of air.

But the household, being used to this, always followed at a less break-neck pace with their own books, and the elder sisters kept the tribe of Gad to order and attention.

The tribal lessons came on after breakfast.

What conscientious efforts Polly and Daisy made with those brats. How deeply they sighed over Bobby and Billy and Jemmie, who rebelled against their authority; and, although seeming healthy and exulting in rather too many wits out of doors, assumed an appearance of lumpish dulness in the school-room that might almost have led one to dread water on the brain, or future idiocy.

A little such dulness, then all the more blithesomeness!

By the noonday workmen's bell all this mental labour was joyfully ended; and for the rest of the morning only pleasure remained to the sisters.

The squire would be calling to come out and see the hay; or the bees might be swarming; or there was the boat waiting to be paddled up the slow, sleepy river, past the elms and among the water-flags and

lilies. Or Slug would want an easy canter along the shady side of the meadows.

Luncheon done, and the sleepy time after existed through, the basket-carriage and fat pony might come round for Mrs. Dimity to be driven by one of her willing little step-daughters to see the vicar's wife; the gentle but incapable step-mother being frightened at holding the reins, herself, of even the dullest of Dobbins. Or else they would be driven by the old coachman in the big carriage, with the pair of fat horses, to pay afternoon calls on their rather distant, few, and sleepy neighbours.

Although respecting the latter very much, and seeing them seldom, the Dimities always said, "Let us hope they will be out," with as fervent unction as would people hurrying through a London season; feeling certain that the first instinct of many of their neighbours would be to hide behind the laurel-

bushes, although they, too, really liked the Dimities.

Failing these efforts at participating in gay society, as Mrs. Dimity persisted, with meek obstinacy, in regarding them—there was the village to visit.

This was a comfortable little hamlet, consisting of about half a dozen scattered cottages, all as snug as could be, the united households of which possessed between them all only two sick and one very aged inhabitant. These latter the two little Dimity sisters conscientiously visited very often indeed, carrying little baskets of blessings, old port, and new flannel; although an acid-minded person might have said with truth that these gifts were really luxuries, not being positively wanted; and that millions of unknown beings needed them far more.

Then the sun would begin to sink, and a sense of good rest after good labour to steal

over the happily-tired earth and its workers.

> "The evening comes, the field is still.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Deserted is the half-mown plain,
> Silent the swaths! the ringing wain."

Yes, it might be dull in the country; it was quiet, but who could say it was not happy in the jocund summer-time, who, at least, that was as fresh, and young, and happy-hearted as Daisy Dimity and her hardly full-grown sister?

The good squire would nod indoors after his hearty dinner. His meek partner, dreading dews, would carefully shut out the soft night-airs by closing the drawing-room windows tight, and pulling down the blinds; calling the dusk blind man's holiday; and ringing at the earliest moment for a double-burner lamp. Sitting primly upright under this on a low but very stiff-backed chair, Mrs. Dimity would nightly have so many

long seams of what she euphemistically termed "white work," that what became of it all was a marvel, even bearing in mind the wants of the turbulent tribe.

Of course a sewing machine would have hemmed these far quicker and better, but Mrs. Dimity looked with an eye of rivalship upon sewing machines. White work was what she had been brought up to sew of an evening; and it seemed as if white work alone could or should occupy the second Mrs. Dimity's evenings for the remainder of her life. Summer or winter, thus she sewed. But she liked winter evenings best, because then she could spend longer hours at the long white seams.

The tribe, thank goodness! would now be safe, and, let it be hoped, quiet in bed. But Daisy and Polly were neither nodding nor sewing indoors.

Out in the sweet summer dark or the

moonlight they would be, rejoicing in all the summer's beauty that abides in our cool little isle so short a space. They would be listening to the nightingales which sing in happy Royalshire, or chatting together up and down among the rose-trellises, or the pleached alley, or by the borders of the sleepy wood and sleepy river.

And what they could find to talk about, seeing their lives were so simple and same, it would be hard to say! But theirs were healthy, harmless jocund lives, and at sweet seventeen a little makes us laugh.

> "Oh, primavera! gioventù dell' anno!
> Oh, gioventù, primavera della vita!"

Well! and how did Daisy wake in Marstown?

First, no sweet morning scents of mignonette or hay to salute awaking senses.

Instead of the lark's sweet lay, far on high in the sky, came up from just below in

the street the cry of "Umberell-*a*hs to mend!" in always hoarser reiteration.

As to prayers, the girls never came down to them, so poor Mrs. Cox read them aloud for Daisy's benefit, and when she had no guest, presumably read them to herself. But it was always precisely at prayer-time that the barrel-organ, or the German brass band, would choose to strike up some ear-splitting valse exactly opposite the window.

The Cox girls made no pretence any longer of coming down in time for breakfast; but, treating Daisy now with real confidence as one of themselves, left her to be their mother's only matutinal companion.

Afterwards—well, we know how Daisy hitherto spent most of her time; but a confidential letter to Polly may tell of some small remaining thoughts thereon, left in the crannies of her mind.

(Private!!!)

"DARLING POLLY,—Don't show this to anybody else, though I've nothing very particular to write.

"I got up quite early to have a chat with you. It is very hard here to get any time to myself; for the Cox girls always scold me when I sit down to read or write. Then all morning other girls run in and out visiting, and a great many gentlemen come at tea-time.

"Oh! my dear, on Sunday night I *was* so mortified. We went to the cathedral in the evening, which I would have enjoyed ever so much, but that Major Hodge and Mr. Jones came with us, and would keep whispering and laughing so much with Fuzzy and Pussy that the service was quite spoilt.

"Jack, of course, was with us too.

"Mrs. Cox made ever so many excuses

for not being able to ask Mr. Lee too—*for me!* She said the doctor did not like so many coming back to supper.

"I told her the truth—I was very glad she had not; but hope she did not see that I was hurt at the idea of having anybody asked for me in that especial way. Perhaps, when one has been out longer, one would not mind so much. Also I could not tell her that Captain Gascoigne thought it vulgar.

"And there he was in the cathedral, with two such nice-looking, quiet men, his friends; and once, in the psalms, when the rest were handing chocolates to each other and giggling quite loud, he looked round! I did so wish I could have been a church-mouse and had a hole to creep into. Then going out, he said to Jack in the crowd, 'Are you all going back to supper?' Perhaps when Jack said 'Yes,' he thought one of the

gentlemen had been 'asked for me,' for I almost fancied he looked at me. But indeed I came and went with Mrs. Cox, and never even *looked* at them.

"And after supper that night, Major Hodge actually tried to pay *me* attention (which I thought very horrid of him!). I put him off, for our poor Fuzzy is so fond of him and looked so jealous.

"Indeed, the old doctor helped; for in the evenings at home, if any gentlemen come in, he always makes a great fuss about me; comes and says, 'Ah! Charmer, or Beauty, we have not met all the day, now let an old man have a *little* chance of a talk.' Then he puts me in a corner, and sits in front staring at me with his funny round face and big eyes, admiring my arms, or hair, or feet, till I am quite uncomfortable and don't know what to say. Or else he asks me to play draughts or back-

gammon, saying there is nobody he ever liked playing with so much. Of course it is very nice he likes me so much; still—quite between ourselves!—he is rather a pleasant old humbug, I am afraid, for when no strangers are there, he just goes to sleep and forgets all about me.

"Papa sent me a kind message to bring back the Cox girls, if they liked, to stay as long as they chose, for a quiet visit.

"But when I told them, they seemed very doubtful; having found out that the only unmarried gentleman near Elm Hall is the curate, and that he has taken a vow of (can't spell it!)—Pussy called it, 'perpetual selfishness,'—they quite decided against coming till we have our hunt ball next winter.

"Fuzzy said to me, 'You see, dear, it would be *such a waste of time*.' You may think that horrid of her, but it was very honest. She really always says the worst

of herself, and is most kind and good-natured.

"Indeed, they all mean to be that towards me; but it is not quite so hearty and sincere in the other two sisters, I think. Birdie is often very ill-tempered with the rest, because she is the spoilt child. Then she rushes to throw her arms round my neck—and kisses *me*—saying she is very naughty, but will never do so any more. I sincerely wish she would not; for I can't quite believe now in her repentance, and don't want her apologies.

"You ask which I like best, Captain Gascoigne or Mr. Lee. Dear child, how can I tell you; they are so different! Of course *you* would like Captain Gascoigne best—there is no doubt about that. He is not what you would call frivolous, and no one on earth could help respecting him very much. And then he is such

a good man—at least, *I am sure he is!*

"But though, of course, you would be right, still Mr. Lee is very nice, too. He never frightens one by being severe, like some of the other gentlemen; and sometimes, if some of the others have made me feel shy, he quite cheers me up; he is such fun, and pays such delightful compliments.

"Now good-bye, darling. Do you miss me very much? I do so wish we could have a good chat this minute together. With fond love, ever your most affectionate sister,

"DAISY.

"P.S.—I tried hard not to write this—but really must just tell you. When I happened to be looking over Birdie's music yesterday, there were three songs with, 'From Jack to Birdie,' written in her own hand. Only fancy! anybody might have

seen it. What would they think? It annoyed me very much.

"P.P.S.—I opened my letter, being afraid that my last secret may make you uneasy, to confide that it is after breakfast now, and Jack came up, so I thought it right to tell him what I had seen. It took a great deal of courage, being afraid he would think me *interfering;* so I first begged his pardon before he knew what it was about. (Luckily, none of the girls were out of their bed-rooms yet.) I said it made me quite afraid he was *engaged;* and of course, though Polly and I would be fond of anyone he chose, still I did hope he would think well over it. But all he did was to pinch my ear, and go off into one of those great yells of laughter that we are always telling him are quite vulgar. He said, 'Oh, I must tell that to Gascoigne. Gascoigne must hear that.' Then in sailed

Mrs. Cox, to know what we were laughing about. (Somehow, Jack and I never get a minute alone.) But, when he saw I looked distressed, he came and pinched my other ear, whispering, 'All right, little one, don't you be afraid; I can see through a mile-stone as well as most people yet. And you may tell Polly, from me, that one sister is quite enough plague for each of you yet a while, in my opinion!'

"There, dear; it is a great blessing to think of that, isn't it?

"For otherwise, although I do think Jack *oughtn't* to, it never would do, would it?

"Yours again,

"D. D."

CHAPTER VII.

"And trust me, dear! good-humour can prevail
When airs and flights and screams and scolding fail.
Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;
Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul."

"WHAT! stuff the bodice with sawdust to make a fine figure of it. Lovely idea! What a clever, angelic Daisy you are to have such a grand idea!"

"Indeed—! Well, Miss Cox, *I* call it a hideous, horrible idea," growled the deep voice of Jack Dimity, as, unannounced, he entered the Miss Coxes' "muddle-room" unawares. (He had, however, been "made free" of that retreat on the strength of his relationship to Daisy.)

"And did I hear this proposition coming from my innocent little sister, too? Daisy, if *you've* got any sawdust about you, I'll—I'll run a pin into you! Come here, miss, this instant."

His denunciation was greeted with a chorus of shrill girlish laughter. And then Fuzzy, as soon as she had breath to speak—for the Cox girls always laughed loud and long, and then would very likely have two or three fresh outbursts all over again—explained, with her usual love of military expressions, that meaning to have "a field-day" to review all their old dresses, and see how these could be "tittivated" up afresh, they had lamented the expense of going to dressmakers, and the trouble of fitting gowns themselves on their own persons.

Whereupon Daisy, with a most glorious flash of inspiration, had suggested to make themselves a lay figure—a milliner's dummy.

"But stuff myself with sawdust! that would be a *deal* too much, Mr. Dimity—ha! ha! Now, Birdie, *don't* pinch me. If you can't make a pun yourself, that's no reason why you should always try to stop everyone else."

For Birdie, whose wits were not so keen as those of her two elders, but who always liked to be foremost, had a smart way of thus asserting her powers of bodily raillery, or of stifling her sisters with a sofa-cushion; they did not like it, but strangers always laughed.

"I know—" continued Fuzzy, elated at having triumphantly dodged her younger's attack, and pleased to secure Jack's attention for once, "I do know that *that* Miss Black, for instance, whose figure all you men admire so much, is all made up with—what *do you think?*"

"Oh! hu—sh, Fuzzy dear," murmured

Daisy, rather scandalised. "Jack, just look here at our future Aunt Sally." So saying she held up a stout holland bodice, tightly closed up everywhere except at the neck, where the sawdust was to be put in. This was her own invention, and she eyed it with pride, though it still hung limp as an empty balloon.

Then said some of the female voices,

"But how on earth is it to be mounted?"

"Two broom-sticks, or the supports of a clothes-rail," promptly uttered Jack, who prided himself on a taste for practical carpentering, and loved driving nails. "I'm your man."

His help was accepted with joyful alacrity. Everyone now had a surfeit of suggestions to offer, and all the cooks began the broth. Fuzzy, however, made the hit of the day by remembering that their parlour-maid was a perfect virgin mine of possibilities in the

way of clothes-rails and sawdust, since she had an admirer who kept a carpenter's shop in a back street hard by. Thither the demure damsel was accordingly sent tripping. Before long she returned smiling, laden with spoils; whilst Jack was still ferreting grimily in the doctor's tiny cellar for cobwebbed remains of wine-boxes, the only spare timber in the house, except Bryant and May's matches, as Fuzzy told him.

Then how they set to work, like new brooms, with a will!

How Jack hacked and sawed with an old rusty pocket-knife and a broken carving-knife, the only tools that could be found, and quarrelled with them alternately, grunting to himself! How the rest dribbled the sawdust into their holland case, and kneaded and pounded down in turns till their fingers were sore! How, as they advanced to the so-called waist of their dummy, they fell

into Pygmalion-like ecstasies over its growing life-likeness!

"It is getting exactly like Miss Black; and I vow it shall be called Miss Black from this time forth for ever more," declared Fuzzy. "Daisy dear" (in a loud whisper), "do you know she is a rival of yours, or rather you have cut her out? Little Lee used to flirt with her most tremendously before you came, and——"

"What is that you are saying about Mr. Lee?" called out Jack, straightforwardly.

It was not the first time, it struck Daisy how odd it seemed that the Cox girls and their friends used to talk of gentlemen behind their backs without any prefix to their surnames. Whereas, on the other hand, men such as Jack—who were of course far more familiar with their comrades—never did so, but set them quite a contrary example.

"I was only telling your sister about Miss Black, and her passion for the Smiler; which is evidently more than his for her," lightly answered Fuzzy.

"Humph; the less Daisy knows of that young person, in my opinion, the better," bluntly uttered the carpenter; who had just succeeded in reducing the extremities of his clothes-rail to human length, and now, with grunts and much disfavour, was hewing a round stand by help of his trusty, many-bladed knife, out of an old Marsala packing-case. "I don't call Miss Black a lady. She tries to talk on the Mall with any officers she meets, though she never saw them before. And she inveigled Mr. Lee out in her boat, and then upset him, though she can row right well, when she pleases. Of course, she meant him to save her from a watery grave, with a romantic ending; but, luckily for him, she found herself clinging

to her preserver, who was a snuffy old boatman that had fished her out. Poor Lee can't swim well, so he was nearly drowned. Besides, as she's not particularly particular herself, she is always trying to accuse other girls."

"No, *does* she! Oh, what does she say of us?" asked all the Cox sisters in one breath.

But Master Jack, perceiving how near indiscretion he was, relapsed into reticence; only remarking—

"No matter. Daisy, remember, I won't have you know her."

But Daisy now knew enough; she was almost certain now who had sent her that horrible, poison-rankling, anonymous letter.

Just then Mrs. Cox entered the room; a thing she hardly ever did when one of the especial gentlemen friends of her daughters were there.

"Which of you girls will go to the market for me?" she said, in a low, anxious voice.

One of the two quiet little school-boys, whom nobody but their mother and the servants ever seemed to regard, was unwell that morning, and kept at home. He had eaten too much suet-dumpling in the kitchen, the only place in the house where these two little come-too-lates were free to make a noise. The mother did not like to leave him: the servants had no time to go out.

"Do, Birdie—do you go, my child, for me. You are doing nothing, I see," and Mrs. Cox, hearing herself called for some of the multifarious household duties that she solely fulfilled, glided away.

"Yes, do go, Birdie. We are all busy except you," cried her sisters.

In truth, that youngest Miss Cox, who hated all work, after beginning the sawdust

with ardour, had desisted on the first moment of feeling tired. She was now sitting beside Jack; teasing him by slipping tintacks into his pockets; or twisting and untwisting her handkerchief till it became a wisp—her favourite trick.

"I won't!" and Birdie, with flashing eyes, sprang up from sitting on the carpet, and came across the room, her rosy cheeks in a flame. "It is just like your selfishness and unkindness to propose me, you nasty, spiteful thing!" she whispered to Fuzzy, but very low, lest Jack should hear; and she enforced her words by a quiet pinch that made poor Fuzzy start, and only nobly refrain from a shriek when she remembered the guests. She just murmured, reproachfully,

"Oh, Birdie, you make my arms all black and blue; and the marks do stay so."

"You need not try that with me," calmly

remarked Pussy now, to her younger sister, with a determined eye. "For I won't stand it; and perhaps you don't want yourself exposed before—him," (glancing at Jack. The latter, as Daisy saw with regret, had one eye for all that was passing, although ostensibly hard at work creating his wooden skeleton; and he had suspiciously begun to hum a tune.)

The aggrieved one went on in increasing anger.

"Don't you know, miss, that ever since I had fever last year papa said I was not to be put in a temper, for it was so bad for me. And I will be in a temper now; I will!—and it is all your fault, and so I shall go and tell him!"

She seemed resolved to execute her threat; for at once tearing her handkerchief down the middle, she bit it and stamped, with tears filling her eyes. Pussy looked at her

utterly unmoved; Fuzzy, dreadfully ashamed, tried to coax her out of the room. But Jack called out, carelessly,

"I say, Daisy, could you not go to the market for Mrs. Cox? You're such a regular old housekeeper, nobody could do it better; and the rest are busy."

Daisy had been busier than any, and the most pleased with her own invention. But she instantly agreed, with a bright smile; and ran out of the room like a good-humoured, but rather frightened, little rabbit, glad to escape from the late scene.

This changed matters: so, after an inward struggle, Pussy joined her, as the one of the two elders who could best be spared. However, all the way to the market she relieved her mind by hanging on Daisy's arm most affectionately, and detailing, in weeping tones, all that the household had to endure from Birdie's ill-humours; above

all, to what trials her own angelic temper was put. She was a quiet enough languishing girl herself, but bore grudges long in her heart; and seemed to have such a smooth surface of mind to offer to society, that one seemed never to get a good mental grip of what she was really like.

However, Daisy did her best under the circumstances: consoled and encouraged her. She only said a few words of plain, direct sympathy; but a great many that were gay and friendly; till, at last, Pussy uttered, with more warmth of sincerity than was usual with her,

"Well; I must say you are a good little thing. You make me feel better for being with you."

The market was crowded with fruit, and at one of the stalls they came full upon Mr. Jones, eating early plums.

"Have some?" he stolidly asked, in an-

swer to Pussy's expressions of delight on having met him. "Don't be shy. I assure you I've just eaten two dozen and three myself," and he pointed to a goodly row of stones and plum-skins to confirm the tale.

Daisy looked at him open-eyed, thinking him surely a most greedy young man; but was rather distressed when, with an air of the greatest good-humour, he pressed not only his uneaten plums, but cherries, strawberries, every fruit upon the stall, on her and Pussy's acceptance.

And, although Daisy strove to decline, her friend took all with such laughing satisfaction, that, not to seem conceited, Miss Dimity reluctantly consented to eat a few cherries—seeing that Mr. Jones grew only the more obtusely and goodnaturedly pressing, the more she refused.

Next, a gallon of peas must be bought, and brought home in the basket Pussy

carried; otherwise, as she openly said, "Those market-women always sent short measure." She and her cavalier began chaffering, accordingly, at all the stalls in succession; or rather, Pussy haggled at each, always offering a half-penny less than the last price to which bargaining could reduce them. Pussy had a quiet passion for bargaining.

At last Daisy could see that even the infatuated swain was growing sick of this. Poor soul! although good-humoured to the very scorn of his detractors, he had a man's dislike of such small dealings; and, to Daisy's horror, she saw him slily hold up a sixpence behind Miss Cox, to the market-woman's gaze.

"Oh, come—you'll give them to such a pretty young lady," he cheerily interposed, with a guffaw.

The woman, smiling, gave way; and with

triumph Pussy marched off, bearing her pease ineffectually covered with a scrap of brown paper, to hide them from the public gaze. Daisy, at that, hastily bought a big posy of mignonette and rosebuds, with which she tried to screen the obtrusive pods that offended her fastidious eyes.

"There is Captain O'Donoghue," suddenly cried out Pussy; pointing to an alley which was a short cut through the market, and much frequented. "Daisy, hurry and speak to him."

But the latter hung back. "I don't like to, indeed; I know him so slightly."

"Little goose! You know him twice as well as I do. You've danced with the man, and I've hardly spoken to him." (Which was strictly true.) "Well, I suppose I must go myself for you. Captain O'Don—o—ghue!" and off started Pussy on a smart chase.

The Beauty was gently sauntering along, seeming to disapprove of the fish and butcher's meat smells that came "betwixt the wind and his nobility." He was evidently thinking of nothing, although caressing his long blonde moustaches with an air of thoughtfulness, when he was thus suddenly boarded by Miss Cox and taken in tow.

Being brought back to Daisy like a noble captive, he smiled upon her utterly sweetly; and, seeing that the little damsel looked timid, turned the tables by soon seeming to assume that he was the gentle conqueror.

"What—you are leaving the market *just* now? Well, then, let me take care of you through all the dangers of the mazy streets and fearful crossings—eh? Aw—won't you?"

"It is not in the least necessary, thank you; Miss Cox and I can very well take care of each other home," coldly replied

Daisy, although rather frightened at her own boldness.

"But three is no company; and our friends in front are evidently not anxious to give you very much of theirs."

In fact, while Daisy still spoke to the handsome Milesian, the others, as if taking for granted she would secure his companionship, had started homewards.

"I shall catch them up in another minute. They will wait for me. Pray don't take the trouble of coming with us, Captain O'Donoghue, for this is quite the opposite direction to the way you were going. I see that . . and you may have business . . . *Pray* don't come out of your way."

"It is not in the least out of my way; and, I assure you, I have no business," returned the gentleman, striding beside her as Daisy hurried along.

His manner was much less patronising

now, for he could tell by his little companion's last tone of sincere entreaty that she really did not wish to have been thrust thus upon his society.

"Let me just go with you, till we catch them up; then I will say good morning, Miss Dimity."

Ah, yes! That was said with a really true-metalled ring, Captain O'Donoghue; still it was easier said than done. For the couple in front were positively racing to keep ahead—and a guffaw that came back from Mr. Jones showed they considered the matter a capital joke.

Outside the market, there was a perfect network of small streets, many quite slums. This was not the direct way back for the young ladies, as Daisy's companion very well knew, so he suspected a plant. But poor Daisy, he soon found, was so unaccustomed to finding her way in any town, that

she was as innocent of the others' guile and almost as helpless as a new-born babe.

The fugitives had just rounded a corner some few seconds before the others. But on coming up, not a trace of them was to be seen; they had apparently vanished.

"They may have gone down this alley."

"No . . . Well, there is another opening; let us try that."

No again. At last came in utter despair, "Where *are* they gone? Oh, Captain O'Donoghue, they can't have forgotten and left me to go back alone with you; that would be too unkind of them!"

"Well, yes, it would be a shame. But I'm afraid that is precisely what they have done, Miss Dimity," slowly answered her care-taker, pityingly; twirling the tip of his right apology for a whisker.

"What—forgotten me?"

"Well—if they have forgotten or not

hardly matters, does it? They have given us the slip, anyway—eh? But I say—aw—don't look so tremendously vexed; please don't. Look here—come now, I'll see you back the whole way quite safe, upon my honour."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Above all other praise must I,
And love my pretie pigsneye;
For nonne I finde so womanlie
As my sweet swetynge."

NO doubt the gallant O'Donoghue would have been very pleased to act escort all the way home, as he had offered, to our little lady.

But this was precisely what Daisy did not wish, although there seemed no help for it.

She looked at the disreputable little alleys near with shrinking, and knew very well she would not have dared to ask her

way through them. It was an evil trick to play her; and Pussy was the quietest seeming of the Cox girls, too.

Captain O'Donoghue had not any intention of presuming upon their position; he was a gentleman, though a good deal conceited. But he was also so used to flirting that he could not leave off his second nature, and would have paid compliments to his grandmother on her good looks, if no other female happened to be present.

Could he help it that—being tall—he must bend his head a little down towards this distressed, small "maye;" that, being aware of having fine eyes, he should show them to the most advantage by looking at Daisy with sweetly protecting glances?

It was not in his nature to like being hurried, accordingly the Freebooter paced by her side at such a gentle saunter that

her impatient, hurrying little feet had to linger also.

And, as it was in his nature to talk soft nothings and nonsense, much as he would play a mild game of lawn-tennis, with all the girls he knew (knowing most expected it of him), how could he guess the growing embarrassment of poor Daisy?

He did not guess it; she was too utterly fresh from green pastures, too, unused to the ways of men, for his understanding.

So they paced along, and she felt like a fluttered dove taken under the wing of a handsome falcon.

She did not know how to look at him; did not know what to say; did not know what to do—for surely Mrs. Grundy would think it a most bold and shocking proceeding for her to be seen walking through a town alone with a gentleman—a strange one, too, and one of the Queen's Freebooters!

She felt so guilty, she did not dare to look around, feeling as if all the passers-by must be framing severe verdicts upon her behaviour. But, at last, when they had been for some minutes in a better street than those from which they had emerged, curiosity prevailed, and a blue gaze timidly searched around for any chance accusers.

A great start!—a full stop; an exclamation of horror.

"There is Captain Gascoigne! Look—on the other side of the street."

"Who? Oh! that man in the 'Strappers;' so he is. He has been walking opposite to us for the last quarter of an hour, I should think. What of that?" drawled O'Donoghue, looking across at the individual in question; who was going with leisurely steps, his nose in the air, as if that, his principal feature, wished to

convey to the world that he was not going to intrude it into other folk's affairs, while his whole attention seemed unusually given to

"The nice conduct of a clouded cane."

"Oh! but what will he think?" in a tone of increasing agony. "He will think it so very strange to see me walking alone with you. Let us go across the street till I tell him how it happened, please."

"Really, Miss Dimity, I do not see that it is necessary to explain to all the passers-by the cause of our being seen together," stiffly answered Daisy's guardian, with a very offended expression. For when thus interrupted in the gentle tenor of his way, he had just been murmuring the hope (in modern language!) that so charming a distressed lady, aw . . . did not dislike being thus rescued by so gallant a knight, um!—eh?

"No, no; I don't mind about other people seeing us so much, but Captain Gascoigne——"

"What! is he such a favoured individual? I *beg* your pardon, Miss Dimity, for not having been aware of it. I must congratulate you—congratulate him rather on being such a happy man."

"Oh! don't, please," cried Daisy, blushing crimson with mortification and shame. "You know, I don't mean that; you must know. It is only that—that he is my brother's greatest friend, and——"

At that very instant, Gascoigne shot a swift glance across the street at them; rather as if he had done so several times before. He saw Daisy colour. She tried to bow, but before she could do so, he had looked carefully away again.

"What; and you think he will tell your brother and get you a scolding, eh? Poor

little girl—is that what she is frightened at? Come! he could never be such a brute. Shall I speak to him by-and-by and try to square it, eh?"

"No; please don't."

It was with difficulty Daisy prevented herself from bursting into tears, although they filled her eyes she hardly knew why.

But to know that Gascoigne must have been seeing her since ever so long ago, apparently nestling under the falcon's wing! to feel now as if he must be aware, even though he did not look round again, of her guardian's new tone of fondling, pitying patronage, that roused her spirit like an insult—it was too much!

"No, please say nothing whatever to Captain Gascoigne. I can speak to him himself, if it is necessary; but it is not," she repeated, with freezing dignity. "He may tell what he pleases to my brother; I

am not in the least afraid of Jack misjudging me. Only—many thanks for having brought me so far; but I think it would be best for me to go home alone now."

"Eh? . . . but why, in the name of all that is foolish? You see Captain—aw, what's his name?—Gascoigne, and instantly you are wanting to bolt."

"Because I don't wish to meet *any* acquaintances. We—we don't like walking alone with gentlemen in our part of the world, Captain O'Donoghue."

"Ah! really, although there are so few there, I believe. You surprise me, Miss Dimity; for there must be a great many cows to be met with in your walks abroad" (in a rallying tone). "Come—eh? Be a sensible child. Why!—give you my word, I walk about the town with some different Marstown young lady almost every day of

my life—'pon my honour, I do; come now."

"Very likely. But I am not a Marstown young lady, and now I *will* go back by myself," in a tone made more fiercely decided by being in a pet, and in overwrought distress.

Captain O'Donoghue stopped still; smiled: took off his hat.

"I never go against any lady's will, Miss Dimity; so I wish you a very good morning."

He turned, and walked rather sharply back in the direction from which they had come, whistling lightly to himself.

Daisy walked on by herself, with additionally dismal feelings.

"There—I've vexed *him* now; and it was good-natured of him, after all, taking charge of me. Just like my stupidity. How could Pussy play me such a trick?

Oh, dear; I wish I was back home at Elm Hall!"

And she did not know her way in the very least!

In front was a street, containing two cheap butcher's shops, round which many of the lower orders were jostling; also a public-house. It was really a street used very much as a thoroughfare; but to Daisy, unused to all back streets, it seemed of the slums, slummy; and her heart sank at thoughts of traversing it utterly alone.

Besides—*was* it the way? Which—where—was the right way, alas!

No matter; there was Captain Gascoigne's tall figure still sauntering easily ahead, so, taking him as her beacon, this poor little shipwrecked mariner crept humbly in the distance after him. A gang of rough workmen came shouldering along, and she quailed. Just then she saw Gascoigne

halt and look round, so took heart of grace and went on.

A second time, at a crowded crossing, he again slackened his pace, and seemed to watch her over it. But outside the public-house there was a little crowd, where some wrangling was going on. Daisy was almost inclined to believe, but was not yet quite sure, that Captain Gascoigne had been watching over her safety before—but now—? Now he stopped a third time, and fairly waited for her to come up.

"There seems a row here, Miss Dimity. Perhaps, since you are alone now, you would like to have an escort past it?"

Such a coldly civil tone; such a cool glance; surely a faintest emphasis of that *now*.

And he had never said, How do you do?

This so cut Daisy to the heart that she could have cried again; but, feeling un-

able to speak to her own satisfaction, she only made a little assenting gesture, and still more meekly went, with small steps, after her new escort.

The danger passed, Gascoigne, in his turn, stopped still; took off his hat; but did not smile at all.

"Your road is clear now, Miss Dimity, I think; so I shall wish you good morning."

He had turned away, when he heard, with some surprise, a small voice behind him,—

"Oh! do stay; just listen to me for one moment, please."

It was said with a little gasp that made Gascoigne look down slightly startled. Then he saw that her eyes were rather like wet veronicas, and her face quivering.

"What has distressed you? You have been vexed. What is the matter?" he exclaimed, with real concern.

"No, I am not vexed, except—— Yes, I *am* vexed because you—you must think it so strange of me to have been walking alone with *that man!*" Thus the handsomest officer in the British Army was designated by this slighting, small personage! Such is fame!

Then, as her new protector waited, still more surprised, the whole history of the desertion in the market was hurried out.

"And I have been so miserable, ever since I first saw you, wondering what you could think of me."

"You were *not—really?*" with an immensely flattered tone, and a look quite as tender as that of the Beauty; but which, however, did not rouse Daisy's illogical spirit at all. He seemed thinking,

> "She is so proper and pure,
> Stedfaste, stabyll, and demure,
> There is nonne suche, ye may be sure,
> As my swete swetynge."

With almost a bashful air of pleasure, Gascoigne allowed himself to say,

"Well—I confess to having been a *lit*-tle surprised; for it seemed unlike your usual habits. Still it is very good of you to have thought so much of my opinion."

"Oh! but ever since you found that horrid book in my workbox, I have been always afraid you must think so strangely of me. And indeed, Captain Gascoigne, it was only put there for a joke by some of the rest, because they said I was so ignorant! Don't you remember, I wanted to explain it all to you in the gardens next day; but somehow you frightened me too much—you *do remember?*"

Remember? . . . Of course Gascoigne remembered . . . And so at last this famous EXPLANATION was made. It would have been unlike mortal man not to be still more flattered at such reverence.

"And you have thought about such a little matter ALL this time!"

That was all he said.

But it was evidently enough in Daisy's eyes, for she looked down.

"And now," went on Gascoigne, still gratified, but briefly, as if present affairs must not be neglected any longer, "how are you going to make your way back? It is quite easy, however . . . You can find it?" This last was uttered inquiringly, as, despite his tone of assurance, a shadow of doubt flitted over the clear face before him.

"I have not the slightest idea where I am; or which is the way," with equal assurance to his own. Then, with reviving spirits, and an air of innocent trust in him, "No matter; will you show it me?"

"But how about the Marstown gossips? If it is wrong to be seen alone with Cap-

tain O'Donoghue, is it quite harmless to be seen with me?" smiling.

"I—oh! I—I never thought about that," murmured little Miss Dimity, looking down.

"If even I could go, I am afraid I dare not now," went on Gascoigne, pulling out his watch. "For, to tell you the truth, I ought to be doing some rather important business; and have delayed almost too long."

"You waited to see me in safely! Oh! please hurry away; don't wait any more—thank you already so very, very much."

"Wait a moment. Let me see you start safely first. You must go along this street to the church; then take the second turning to your left; then the first to your right; then the first to your left, and there you are. Can you remember?"

"I must take the second turning here—

no, I mean after the church—to my right, then the next to my left, and then—why, there I am!" glibly repeated Miss Daisy, who had almost as simple a head as her field namesake.

Poor Gascoigne sighed. Suddenly, he exclaimed, with joy,

"Look! there are the Miss Silverthornes; they are going home to lunch, I know. Promise me to follow them exactly, and they will lead you next door."

"I do promise."

And away went her guide with a light heart and relieved air.

Daisy now kept religiously trotting at a little distance behind the two little old ladies.

She could not help trotting, because they trotted; if she went at her usual pace she found herself close on their heels; if she went slower she was vastly afraid

of losing these her last protectors.

A hansom tore past her at great speed, soon after she had started; and Gascoigne smiled out of it upon her, like the sun-god out of his chariot.

What a hurry he seemed to be in! How twice, thrice, too good it had been of him to delay thus long on her account!

So, a young person with a most smiling face and quite restored happiness, followed the old spinsters past the church; then down the several turnings to left, to right, and so on.

Now they had come out into a street beside a square; which square was the haunt of many poor dogs, very likely homeless, that found it convenient to slip through the railings, and thus often escape persecution. One such sad cur, slinking from his oasis of refuge, had just found a nasty bone in the street, and was giving

himself the toothsome delight of a worry before making off to safety with the treasure trove. At the same time, a little white dog that belonged to the Miss Silverthornes trotted up, very much with the same action as his mistresses; and stood still to gaze at the vulgar sight.

Some people tell one that ALL dogs are unselfish, friendly, and full of virtues putting us to the blush. That I do not believe. No more than I believe that ALL children are charming and angelic little creatures. One of the latter whom I knew used to have a playful habit of creeping under the dining-table, and transfixing the calves of the legs of his father's guests with a carving-fork. His fond parents declared he did this in angelic innocence, in the supposition that the victims enjoyed the game equally with himself, and that he took their starts and outcries for excla-

mations of delight. *I* always looked upon that child as an incipient young ruffian.

As to dogs again, I hold they have their different characters just as children. Broadly speaking, they are likewise all that is innocent and excellent. But still there are black lambs in the fold; just as crows, however honest, have some thieves in their community whom they always promptly judge and kill. Some dogs are conceited, and growl if laughed at, to their silliest old age; others are selfish; and some few, however well-treated, have a surly spot in their hearts, never eradicated; possibly from not being taught a canine catechism.

Thus the little white dog of the Misses Silverthorne stood and sneered at the dinner of his dejected neighbour. He raised his upper lip, showing an offensive tooth as he did so. Just in the same way

we always show our eye-tooth when we sneer; which Professor Darwin therefore calls our canine tooth, proving thereby our doggish derivation in the chain of evolution.

It was nasty of the little white dog.'

And, to be still nastier, he now made a feint of snatching himself at the bone; purely with a view of teasing. He had a way of thus outraging the feelings of other dogs, and then taking refuge under the petticoats of his mistresses.

But the poor outcast was too hungry to discriminate nicely between practical joking and reality, when his only meal was endangered. He gave a *gu-r-r* of warning! Sir Impudence turned one eye upon his mistresses, who had instantly stopped to protect their darling; then like an old actor "measuring distance" to their skirts, danced at the bone again.

One growl! a dart—a roll in the dust! and terrified squeakings followed. "Fido! Fido! Policeman!—My darling!—You brute!—Come here!—Be off!—Po-*lice*-man!" shrieked the horrified old ladies; not daring even in that sore distress to raise their voices to an indelicate pitch of screaming, whilst in a terrible fright they feebly beat on the enemy's back with their lace parasols.

But—long before the human blue-bottle at the street-corner would have bestirred himself—help came.

Daisy had rushed to the rescue; and being as fearless as any country-maiden could be in such matters, caught the bigger dog by the throat and choked him off. Luckily his mouth had been so full of Fido's woolly hide, that the latter was barely scratched, when the eldest and most courageous of his old mistresses snatched

him up trembling. So all might have ended well, but for the misery-dulled perceptions of the poor street-cur.

Only seeing in Daisy another claimant for his wretched bone—just as she released him, he turned and bit her arm. Then, with a howl of mingled vengeance and triumph, he sprang upon his booty; and tucking his tail between his legs so that no pursuers should get a bite at it, he disappeared between the square railings, and out of this history for evermore.

"Oh, are you badly hurt? Dear, dear! she is bleeding. Sister, sister, call a cab, and let us take her to a chemist—no, to the doctor—no, the hospital! Oh, how grieved we are! how thankful we are——!"

"There is no cab-stand near. Are you faint? Let us support you to the end of the street till we get one."

Thus the two silver-grey dressed spin-

sters exclaimed, in tremulous tones; hovering round Daisy.

To their vast relief, she laughed bravely in their faces, and tied her handkerchief round her wrist herself. It was a mere nothing she declared; they must not be troubled about such a trifle.

What could they do for her?

Well, please, could they show her the way home—to Khyber Pass Road?

"Why, that is our road also!" cried the little old ladies; on which, each offering to support Daisy home on either side, they overwhelmed her with tender little ejaculations and inquiries.

In a few minutes, they reached the Khyber Pass Road; and delicately inquired to which of the brand-new, red-brick villas Daisy was bound.

"Do you live, my dear, in Khurum Vale, or in Coomassie House?"

"In neither; in Magdala Villa," replied Daisy, in a rather subdued voice.

"In—deed. We did not know—we did not recognize you as one of the Miss Coxes," murmured the sister-supporters, in tones that might have been frosty but for the thawing warmth of their gratitude.

Daisy explained that she was only a visitor there, lately come.

"And we live next door. Ours we call Lilac Lodge. We did not like these blood-thirsty, military names. We wanted something to remind us of the country, although we do live in a garrison-town," cooed the old Miss Silverthornes.

And then both exclaimed in the same breath to each other—

"Sister, sister; see how pale she is getting! You must come in with us, poor child. We will get you a glass of wine; we must bandage your arm."

They were so eager on either side of her that Daisy could not resist them; especially as she had begun to feel rather sick, as much with her excited walk, and the heat of the sun, as from the dog's bite. It was grateful to find herself being led, with gentle utterances of sympathy, into a shaded, almost dark room—fragrant with flowers—exquisitely cool.

"Bring a glass of madeira—our father's *old* madeira, sister," whispered the eldest.

Then Daisy was forced to swallow such a glass of wine as was molten gold, compared with Mrs. Cox's cheapest of Marsalas.

Meanwhile, the most smiling of comely middle-aged maids had brought hot water and the softest of linen napkins, marked (as Daisy languidly noticed) with a date quite half a century old. And such gentle fomentations followed; and pitying of that plump white arm; and tender ban-

dagings as would have half cured anyone.

"I feel *quite* cured, now," Daisy declared, when, at last, all was ended, and she felt really herself again.

"But sit still, my dear; and use these smelling-salts a little more, and let me put just a l*ee*-tle more toilet-vinegar on your temples, and some eau-de-cologne in your palms," entreated the old ladies; and then they looked at her and looked at Fido alternately, almost as if she had saved the life of the child of their old age.

Then they began to chat, their hearts being opened wide.

Their young visitor told them very soon how she had come to stay for the ball given "by her brother's regiment." (She always spoke as if the full regiment of "Strappers," from colonel to drummer-boy, belonged wholly and solely to Lieutenant Jack Dimity.)

"And so you had never known the Coxes before," said these old ladies, much interested, and giving each the slightest of little coughs at mention of the Cox family. "We—we never have called upon Mrs. Cox; for really—well, the fact is, my dear, we call on very few people, unless they are connected with old friends far away from here. You see, having come late in life to Marstown, and living in such a very quiet way in this small house, we did not think any young people like your friends would care for the society of such old frumps."

Daisy—having a sudden conviction that some of the Cox girls must have been overheard using this epithet of their neighbours—gazed rather wide-eyed at the sisters.

Frumps! Well, it would be hard to call them so. Nothing more neat, more deli-

cate and dainty could be imagined, among old maids, than the appearance of these white-haired spinsters in their silver-grey dresses. They looked fit to be put under glass cases; with their old-world, good breeding that seemed to exhale from each as a surrounding atmosphere. One could never declare wherein peculiarly lay the old-fashioned charm suggesting the good old term "gentlewomen." Their carriage, old and stiff as they were, was still straight-backed as that of an Evelina; their pose perfect; the way in which they shook hands, a mixture of gentle warmth and intense dignity not to be described; the air of self-identification with whatever concerns of their guests the latter might be speaking of, utterly absolute.

And yet, in the latter instance, no one could think them humbugs, though when the guests left not another word on this

subject ever again crossed the old ladies' lips. Only for the time being they had tried to carry out the Christian precept, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." The occasion gone, they turned to receive the confidences of fresh visitors.

Tattling, or gossip of others' really private affairs, they held vulgar: beneath their dignity.

The room that held these two old-fashioned specimens of bygone English life and breeding, almost cheated one into believing it belonged, not to a new villa in Khyber Pass Road, but to some quiet home of several centuries ago.

All its summer draperies of good old-fashioned chintzes, such as are never made now-a-days, seemed to have been washed just yesterday and dried on some cowslip green; while the scent of country jasmine

and bean-blossoms almost, to the fancy, hung upon them still. The floor was mostly polished, because the well-worn but still handsome Turkey rug in the centre was so very small. There were also tables and a few chairs of fine old carved oak, with an "S" for the family name in medallions. If the rest of the furniture was painfully new, that unwelcome fact was almost hidden from prying eyes by cushions of finest needlework which one's eyes were strained in admiring; and table-cloths and coverlets that had been embroidered with flowers and shepherds and their sweethearts, in days when Time ran far, far slower than now.

And however old and long-used all these plainly were, they were not shabby; having been kept with too much loving pride and care.

All this, which takes somewhat long to

describe, had stolen into Daisy's perception in a few minutes after she had entered the house. She felt in the presence of gentility that did not grieve by its poverty, although it suggested former comparative riches. Rather the old Silverthorne ladies seemed to possess a slender but sufficient stipend; a modest competence. However much more they might have had, at present they seemed to have ENOUGH.

Meanwhile, they in turn had been examining Daisy Dimity.

They saw a sweet, fresh-looking maiden, small, trim, and plump, with very nice clothes, very well put upon her. And surveying her kindly from the crown of her yellow, daisy-like head to her neat little feet, one sister said to the other, hesitatingly,

"Surely we have seen Miss—Miss Dimity somewhere before."

"Oh, yes," quoth the guest, very promptly, with some terror at her own boldness. "It was on Sunday, when you made such a mistake about poor Captain Gascoigne. Indeed! it was a great mistake. Please forgive me for saying so, but you wronged him very much."

The sisters looked at each other, astonished.

"What mistake, my dear?—do tell us. Yes, yes; you must certainly tell us."

So, blushing now at playing Portia to the absent one, Miss Daisy did modestly tell them the story of how unhappy Gascoigne had been at the practical joke played on his friends. "And he told me you were such great friends of his; and how much he liked you."

"What a mistake we did make! Certainly, it seemed very unlike dear Gerald Gascoigne—poor Geraldine's son. His mother, my dear, was our very greatest friend."

The sisters were so happy at this terrible mistake being set to rights that they could not sufficiently thank Daisy for thus restoring to them, as it were, not only Fido, but also their male human favourite.

"You will promise faithfully to come in every day and have your arm dressed by us—; by no one else," they repeated again and again, as Daisy bade them good-bye.

So she faithfully promised.

When she crossed the threshold of the Coxes' work-room once more, Jack's voice cried cheerily out,

"What hours you have been, little slow-coach! Look at our glorious Aunt Sally."

A horrible travesty of human nature,

with a stout body, skeleton legs, and an old crinoline for the display of future draperies, stood in the middle of the floor.

The dummy was, indeed, a success.

CHAPTER IX.

"We three Archers be,
Rangers that rove through the north countree,
Lovers of ven'son and liberty,
That value not honours or money.

"We three merry men be,
At a lass or a glass under greenwood-tree;
Jocundly chaunting our ancient glee,
Though we had not a penny of money."

WHAT a sensation of curiosity, mixed with a little awe, and not without a dash of embarrassment, it must give every well-brought-up country maiden to go to her first military dance!

Her first military dance, and perhaps

only her second one of any kind of dance hitherto whatsoever!

Add to this that Miss Daisy Dimity's very first dance had been rather disappointing; almost "scrubby;" whilst *this*, all her female friends declared, would be "scrumptious." And that she was also by nature a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed little soul, made to be much petted, and a good deal admired; but very demure in her flirtations. Thus you have Daisy's state of mind, when going to the dance given by that favoured regiment which was graced by possessing Captain O'Donoghue as its own.

The narrow stone staircase up which they were shown gave first a feeling of disillusionment, for it seemed to Daisy very like those leading to her father's granaries at home. The white-washed walls were cold, forbidding, and surely not very white; the paint on these doors they passed really

not spotless. But inside the cloak-room, what a difference! This was some officer's room, so fitted up with almost luxuries as to make one think that soldiering was not altogether a lot of unmitigated hardship, with a "lodging on the cold ground."

"What a lovely big glass over his chimney-piece, and *real* lace on the velvet flounce below! Dear, dear! officers were not so extravagant in my young days," sighed ponderous Mrs. Smeeth, who was disrobing herself from a Paisley shawl.

"Flounce, mother—it's not a petticoat," scornfully ejaculated Essie, flouncing at her mother. "It's Captain O'Donoghue's room, I'll bet, for he is so fond of looking at himself."

"Do, Miss Dimity dear, just peep into that photograph book beside you, and tell us who is in it," playfully whispered Miss Grace.

"Oh, no—indeed, I would rather not," answered Daisy, recoiling, and shaking out her skirts busily.

"Here's pink powder and white!—every comfort provided," exclaimed Fuzzy Cox, eagerly dusting her face with some *poudre de riz;* whilst Pussy, with a simper, musingly appropriated the Bloom de Ninon, thinking that would suit her complexion better.

In the background, Mrs. Brandiston-Browne was deluging her own and her daughter's handkerchiefs with perfume from some of the cut glass bottles liberally displayed by the unknown owner.

"One doesn't keep it at home, my dear," she confidingly nodded to Daisy.

Daisy wished everyone would not confide in her; besides she rather disliked scent, preferring soap and water.

When all the girls had in turn hated

each other for staying too long at the looking-glass, Mrs. Cox marshalled her party into the ante-room.

Daisy felt as if plunged at once into a group of uniformed men that seemed all eyes, stares, and red jackets, to her frightened imagination; not one of whom she knew, or at least recognized. When she recovered from her bewilderment, she found that Captain O'Donoghue had stepped forward, after his colonel received them, and was smiling on Pussy. Pussy, to whom he had never spoken before that day at the market! With much by-play of eyes and mutual murmured chaff upon the trick she had played him, he was writing—writing—writing his name on her card.

Daisy, being apparently quite forgotten by him, gazed transfixed from behind Mrs. Cox's sheltering skirts. It was *she*,

nevertheless, for whose sake all the Coxes had been invited.

Not that our little lady really minded a bit; only her pride was slightly touched, and she felt that—"now she knew what men were."

Strange faces, strange faces all around; tall men, stout men, young and old, slim Adonis and corpulent Falstaff, all alike in short mess jackets.

Almost all these were busy writing their names on the cards of the different girls, except on that of Daisy. She knew not one of all these strangers; Jack was not there. The Coxes were carefully filling their cards first before thinking of her.

Yet stay; two thin youths, with drab faces and tow-coloured hair, suddenly advanced upon her with joy. They were Jack's juniors, who had so unmercifully

pounded her feet to a jelly at Mrs. Browne's dance.

"We got away before all the rest of our older officers, so as to be *sure* of some dances," remarked one, with satisfaction. "And now, Miss Dimity, may I have the pleasure of this! and this! and this!" (The very best valses!)

"You'll give me the 'Très jollée waltz,' won't you, Miss Dimity?" urged his companion. "That *Très* jollée *is* so jolly, isn't it?"

"But really, Mr. Blount—" mildly expostulated the wretched Daisy, with her feet aching at the recollection of their former suffering——

"*I* am Mr. Hunt; this is Mr. Blount," eagerly interrupted the last youth, and both swains gently smiled, unconscious of her sufferings.

"We are rather alike, so we are some-

times called Castor and Pollux," hazarded the least timid of the Gemini.

With some difficulty, their victim had just rescued some of the best dances from the pencils of these "heavenly twain," when Captain O'Donoghue led up two or three eager, dark-complexioned, black-haired youths.

"Have you got any dances to spare, Miss Dimity?" he asked, with a gentle smile that was almost malicious.

And then, as his followers admiringly closed upon their prey, he patronizingly murmured, in Daisy's pink shell of an ear,

"They will just suit you, I am sure; they are all such *good boys*."

With an inward very great sigh, Daisy relinquished her fond hopes and her card. She had a vague idea now that *all* Jack's beardless subalterns had lint-white hair and well-bred, timid manners; and that all

Captain O'Donoghue's young Freebooters must be swarthy-visaged youths.

It puzzled her frightfully to find out, by-and-by, that this rule did not always hold good; as, during the evening, with youthful generosity, each of these swains brought likewise up their dearest comrades to share the delights of an introduction to—and possible dance with—this new girl, who was (in turn with all new girls) the rage in Marstown.

The dancing was in the mess-room; of which no more need be said than that it had a floor polished to glassiness, a low ceiling, and whitewashed walls decorated with crossed flags.

Daisy saw the other girls disappearing after the first valse, down passages here, and passages there.

The place reminded her of a rabbit-burrow.

But she, not caring much for Mr. Hunt or Mr. Blount's company (which it was she never knew), returned dutifully to Mrs. Cox's side. The latter gave her each time an elegant, faded smile of real liking, and satisfaction that here was no rival coquette.

Just as the second dance was ending, a fresh influx of red mess-jackets signalled the arrival of "Jack's regiment." With what heartfelt joy Daisy saw her brother, *her* Jack in his uniform, looking sternly round him from the doorway like the dear, snub-nosed, square-shouldered young Briton that he was.

In her eyes he was quite as handsome (in his own way) as Captain O'Donoghue himself.

And there behind him was the friendly face of the "Smiler." And !—and there was no one else except such small fry as

Colonel Dunn, and Jack's two majors, and Captain Luxton and his merry wife, whose faces could be discerned in the rear!

Smiler Lee dived straight across the room through the mazy dance, and accosted Daisy with the air of one on his own ground—as surely a dancing-floor was his realm.

"I must see your card to-night, Miss Dimity; it is my business to keep your accounts still, isn't it?"

With a glance of dumb sorrow, the partner of Castor and Pollux dutifully gave up her programme. She merely nodded in silent regret, as Lee inquiringly read out, in an undertone, ("Hunt, Blount —Blount, Hunt! Well, you *did* come early to-night!) But I say" (aloud), "you promised *me* two of these valses, Miss Dimity, the other evening, don't you remember?"

"But I did not know you were coming to-night," scenting deliverance, yet fearful of hurting her captor's feelings.

"Still you promised me these dances first."

The king of the ball-room looked with such an indignant eye upon Castor that that poor young sub-lieutenant meekly offered to resign one of his ill-gotten prizes. Pollux, who was easing *his* back against the acute edge of an adjacent door —waiting for his turn to claim Terpsichore for his kick-and-shuffle attempts at learning to dance—was dejectedly obliged to follow suit.

After which Mr. Lee, with calm satisfaction, restored Miss Dimity's card, confiding in a whisper,

"I have put myself down for five more —seven in all. You *will* give me them, of course, won't you? Fact is—do take my

arm, and sit out with me until our next dance comes—the fact is, there are two girls in the room I am *determined* not to give one single turn to to-night! so I want to dance a lot with you."

He led Daisy along one of the cold, stone, white-washed passages, down which she had seen the other girls going.

They turned into one of several tiny rooms (obviously the lairs of some of Her Majesty's officers in their normal state, but now to be regarded only in the light of flirtation-boudoirs). This one showed tokens of sleep, smoke, and study; sleep signified by a sort of big wardrobe door, closing an alcove, but giving passage to air at the top; smoke faintly suggesting itself by scent clinging to the window-curtains; study—a large amount of novels bestrewn on the top of military drawers.

But there were two little round tables;

four easy-chairs, twos and twos; a subdued light and some scattered knick-knacks to trifle with—which all encouraged the boudoir idea excellently well, especially when helped by the mutual sentiments of whoever sought a *tête-à-tête*.

"I'll tell you all about it," began the dapper little soldier, with an air of cheery confidence, twisting up his moustaches fresh, and smiling upon Daisy, as if the sinner had never smiled on anybody before, or asked sympathy from pretty listening ears—although he spent so much of his life in doing both. "It *is* so jolly to meet a girl like you that one can make a real friend of! Mind you" (sighing with a dramatic air), "there are very few girls that a man like me can make a real friend of. Now there is Miss Black—you've heard, I suppose, of that poetry she sent with all that stuff about a lot of fellows

and ever so much praise of ME? Yes. Well, that girl is awfully gone on me, they say (I'm only just telling *you* this in strict confidence !). But I am determined not to go near her to-night, for it's better to put a stop to that sort of thing at once—don't you think so? *I* can't blame my conscience ; I've only danced with her a good deal because she has a good step ; but it's better to show her at once I can't have that sort of thing."

Daisy listened in some doubt as to what that "sort of thing" was, love or doggerel. But as she sat with rosy lips just parted, and big blue eyes all attention, she looked the very embodiment of a sympathetic listener.

So the Smiler continued, quite delighted with her and with himself :

"And then, would you believe it?—I was never so near being caught in a trap as

this very night by old Mother Browne—this very night, as I came in!" (solemnly). "She stepped forward, in her fawning way, and asked me, would I not take her for a cup of tea? But, *thank* goodness! some fellows had put me up as to what that trick meant——"

"What?" asked Daisy, most interested, for the speaker assumed quite a tragic air over his deliverance.

"Why, she sits down, and begs one to have a little chat, and then asks one's intentions about her daughter—ugh! Luckily I never lose my presence of mind; never. I begged her to excuse me for one moment, as I knew there was a young lady expecting me to dance with her (that was you!). And I got Captain Gascoigne to take the old woman off my hands for tea——"

"Cap—tain Gascoigne? Is he—did he?"

"Yes; why do you look so astonished? Oh, he did it; yes. He didn't care—especially when he knew why I wanted to be rid of her."

Did that mean with reference to dancing with Daisy herself; or to Mrs. Browne?

Daisy dared not ask; but soon, slowly raising her head, that had been very much modestly downbent, whilst pondering over this enigmatical sentence—whom should she see, calmly examining the room and its inmates from the threshold, but Gascoigne himself. And that dreadful living mummy of a woman, Mrs. Browne, was smiling on them too lividly, with her parchment face.

Gascoigne looked irritatingly, maddeningly composed (although he now saw Daisy for the first time since that day at the market!). She felt hot, and inwardly quite excited; he seemed outwardly cool as a cucumber.

He was gone with his companion!—even whilst foolish Daisy sat almost expecting him to rush across the room, and ask her for a dance—foolish little Daisy, as if he would, with Mrs. Browne on his arm!

With a sigh in her heart, our heroine went off to dance with Smiler Lee.

Most beautifully they danced in swift, smooth gyrations, Lee with his left arm held stiffly out like a ship's bowsprit, to warn all feebler dancers from his glorious path. People looked at them admiringly: among others Captain Gascoigne from the doorway, against which he had made himself a sort of caryatid.

But that dance passed; and yet another with Mr. Blount; and still he never came, nor asked poor Daisy—although he kept watching her.

She was quite heart-sick about it.

After that walk home from the market

it seemed so strange, so extraordinary! in a friend; a real man-friend—her friend, Jack's friend, and no flirt like Captain O'Donoghue.

She had still managed to keep some cherished dances, hoping he might ask for them—when, with a good-humoured grin, Major Hodge bore down upon her, followed by a dark, florid gentleman, with the air of a conquering carpet-knight.

"I'm so awfully sorry my own card is quite filled up—going away, you see—old friends, and that sort of thing, ha! ha! *twiggez vous!*" he whispered to Daisy, who rather drew herself up at this familiar form of address, as if she wished to dance with him at all. But the gallant Hodge-Podge, in his own good-humoured, if unrefined way, was resolved to patronize and be good friends with little Miss Dimity; so continued, eyeing her as he might a new-born chick, "I want to introduce Colonel Burke

of ours" (in a whisper); "he's considered the handsomest man in the British Army!"

"He's what?"—thought Daisy, so astonished to hear of another Richmond, of anyone in the same room with Captain O'Donoghue asserting rival claims, that she found herself weakly giving up one of her few remaining treasures, her last valse, to the stranger.

"Ah! now, but ye are in luck to-night, Burke," said Major Hodge, trying to mimic an Irish brogue, and making, like all Saxons, a hideous failure.

"Arrah, then! it's meself that is," responded Colonel Burke, in a feigned Irish accent also, but a more real-seeming one; although, like many who attempt this Doric tongue, his was the accent of a car-driver, rather than of a gentleman, a much easier imitation.

It sounded so strange, coming after the

well-bred tone in which he had addressed Daisy, that she looked at him in mute surprise.

Then—then she found Gascoigne himself addressing her! and turned to him, utterly forgetting the other two, who felt themselves dismissed with a suddenness which a good deal surprised them.

"You have been dancing everything, as I saw—but now may I have a dance at last, Miss Dimity?"

"At last! You should have asked me some time ago, as other people did," half-pouted Daisy. "You have waited so long my card is almost filled."

"Your card. Ah! I forgot—how I do hate cards!" answered Gascoigne, slightly waking up from his dreamy tone. "They are only bills for the bores of the room by which they can dun you. If ever I want

to remember a dance later on I can—could not you?"

"Oh! yes" (meekly). "But please, all I have left is one galop later on, *and this slow dance*—do you mind much?"

This "slow," a thing rejected of all her partners; though, like a tyro in conjuring, she had meekly tried to force it upon them all. It had been flouted with desperate scorn even by Messieurs Hunt and Blount as "a square dance—no, thank you; I only care for a waltz!" with sniffs of superiority.

But Gascoigne took it now good-naturedly, Daisy's glance being certainly appealing.

"I know exactly what you are thinking; you like to dance everything, no matter with whom, like all very young girls. You would be miserable at losing

these lancers," he said, leading her off.

Miss Dimity rather resented the "no matter with whom," and intimated as much. Her partner quite smiled on her, putting away his gravity; his large nose even looking handsome with happiness as he answered,

"Well, then—we are to believe that, whoever you may dance with to-night, you like very much."

"But not the strangers—how could I? This Colonel Burke, for instance, who seems such a dreadful Irishman!—and why is he called the handsomest man in the British Army, when I thought that was Captain O'Donoghue?"

"To my certain knowledge, I have already known seven 'handsomest men in the British Army,'" calmly returned Gascoigne, smiling again at her air of bewilderment. "And as to his accent, Colonel

Burke, I believe, was never in Ireland, though he loves to be considered a genuine Irishman. Captain O'Donoghue, on the other hand, was born and bred there; but he does not think it necessary, I suppose, to remind the world that he comes from the 'distressful country.' Those are the contradictions one sees constantly in life."

Colonel Dunn (Jack's colonel) just then came up with Mrs. Luxton, and invited this couple to be their *vis-à-vis*. His frosty hair and rosy old face beamed and gleamed above a breast so covered with medals they seemed the easiest jingling ornaments in the world to get.

"Jack says his colonel is quite a hero," uttered Daisy, with another surprised look. "And yet he looks so fat and good-humoured one can hardly well believe it."

"Still he has,

'Trod as deep in the red wash o' the wars'

as who walks reddest," smiled Gascoigne, with a new teasing air. "What wonderful experience you are gaining in Marstown, Miss Dimity! You have learnt that heroes can look both jolly and even common-place. And as to being fat—you severe young lady!—have you never heard of

'Plump Comus in a colonel's coat,
Whom we this day expect from far,
A jolly, first-rate man of war'?"

"Now, that is poetry I do remember," cried Daisy, delighted with herself for once. "And you always remind me of the man who

'One sole virtue would arrive at,
To keep his many virtues private.'"

She was becoming a perfect coquette; it was such barefaced flattery! But she was really so happy, she did not think much of what she was saying. And off

went Gascoigne with an equally happy air, looking, in her eyes, "a verray perfight gentil knyght," to shuffle up and down in an aimless way before Miss Essie Smeeth.

No doubt this chasséing and glissading was an excellent opportunity for our ancestors to display their canary-coloured coats and gorgeous small-clothes. But now-a-days, when our gentlemen thus "take the flure," as the Irish say, they seem either not to know WHAT they are to do, nor WHY it should be done; or else some jovial wight will delight a whole room by a few sorry little steps and a caper—whereupon everybody laughs very much, seeming at once to have a revelation that the solemn farce they were all engaged in was not really a stately dance, but simply a burlesque.

Miss Essie familiarly clapped Gascoigne on the arm with her fan.

"You haven't asked me to dance yet, so you'd better be quick about it," she informed him.

Gascoigne, in a manner so quiet it might almost have been suspected of satire, replied,

"I am dancing very little, indeed, to-night, Miss Smeeth."

"Oh, come. You can dance with little Miss Dimity, at all events, it seems. And you know you've never asked me to dance yet, so you must do so some time or other."

"Then, if I happen to see you standing any time to-night, Miss Smeeth, I shall hope to have that pleasure. Otherwise, I never engage a young lady beforehand."

"All right—well, now, don't forget." And, the dance being over, away went Miss Essie with a sportive air, as if she

was longing to clap every other gentleman in the room on the shoulder, too.

"And I hope you won't forget my galop, Miss Dimity," echoed Gascoigne, turning to his partner. "All rules have exceptions, you know. When is it——?"

"Hush! Please take me away somewhere, and I will tell you another time," whispered Daisy, in a mysterious manner. "That young lady in black there--who is she? She looked at me so strangely, as you spoke, it quite frightened me."

Gascoigne looked quickly.

"It is a Miss Black," he said, as he led her away.

Cr-r-r! at that moment Miss Black, passing them with a careless air, stepped on Daisy's pretty gown, tearing out a yard or two of gathers; and going on without apparently perceiving what she had done. The girl in question had a very tight

waist, tight skirts, so tied-in at the knees she could hardly walk straight, very red lips, and curious black linings to her eyelids, "*revers* to them," as Essie Smeeth said. Her black hair was cropped short, and parted on one side, and her black eyes had flashed a glance—although that must have been the effect of imagination—which made Daisy's soft flesh rather creep, as if it had felt the evil eye.

"I did not know you were such an easily frightened little lady," said Gascoigne, still in his happiest vein; his nose having now assumed quite an air of protectorship, as he looked down on the small partner on his arm, who, with a sigh and some pins, had made the damage right again.

"Well, will you come and sit here below the stairs? It is quite an arboreal retreat; three fuchsias in pots, and one india-rubber plant."

Behind the india-rubber plant in question sat Colonel Burke ; behind the fuchsia, Major Hodge ; each flirting with a Miss Cox, and each apparently under the ostrich-like belief that their portly forms were hidden by tropical exuberance of leafage. On the stairs sat Pussy Cox, with Captain O'Donoghue stretched by her side, looking up tenderly into her eyes.

The three greatest men-artists in flirtation in Marstown were in very close company.

It was enough to make Daisy think that these were the only specimens of ball-giving British officers, if she had not had a very different example beside her.

"I have got a scratch on my arm," they heard Pussy softly wail. "Don't you pity me?"

"Poor little arm, where is the scratch?" in dulcet tones.

"Here," showing her wrist like a spoilt child (out of her teens).

"You forget that you have a glove on, so how can I see it?"

"Ah! well—there it is," turning back a portion of glove, and showing a tiny scratch, obviously made by a pin.

"Horrible scratch—poor little wrist! Shall I make it well?" in languidest drawl.

"Shall we go into the tea-room?" asked Gascoigne, by this time rising, so as to hear no more eavesdroppings. Then, as they went, he as suddenly smiled upon Daisy, with some suppressed laughter, but also a positive increase of colour. (Now why should he have felt inclined to blush at showing some especial interest in his companion?) "I heard to-day from two old ladies of somebody else who had a scratched arm. I hope sincerely that the

wound is not very dangerous either, since one sees no signs of it."

Daisy smiled bravely, but said nothing. Her wound was bandaged under a long glove; and it did hurt at times, but she said never a word about it. Instead, she began telling Gascoigne of the beginning and end of that famous expedition to market. Gascoigne professed the deepest interest in Galatea, as he christened the dummy, scorning "Aunt Sally," and thinking Miss Black—"well, just a little dangerous—for she might be vexed." There never was anyone whose habit it was so to put himself in the place of others.

And now his promised galop.

"Write it yourself, for my pencil is lost," said Daisy, lightly.

"What, are you not afraid of my seeing any of the secrets on this card?"

"Not at all. You may read all the

names," with childish joyousness. She felt so utterly, indescribably happy.

Gascoigne slowly read—seven times the name of Lee; silently restored Daisy her card.

She felt as if a cloud had darkened her summer sun. What was the matter? He sat silent. She sat silent.

CHAPTER X.

"A lightsome eye, a soldier's mien,
A feather of the blue,
A doublet of the Lincoln green,
No more of me you knew,
My love!
No more of me you knew."

ON the sofa near this silent couple, Gascoigne and Daisy, sat the wretched Miss Browne, neglected and more crane-like than ever.

Poor soul! not very wise at the best of times, she was additionally afflicted with an infatuation for Smiler Lee, although he was much younger than herself; and her rather staring green-gooseberry eyes now

followed his every motion painfully, as he flitted round the room, bringing tea—in order to make no one jealous—to two or three ladies, with jokes for each.

Colonel Dunn, on the other side, was kindly trying to force some wine on a little weary-faced woman, who had evidently once been pretty.

"You know, you've got a headache; you own to it. Come—*do as the lasses do; say no, but tak' it.*" (The colonel was Scotch, and very fond of the shrewd sayings of his mother-tongue, which he uttered with a hearty burr of relish.)

"What a capital proverb!" said Gascoigne, with one of those slow smiles Daisy had learnt to dread, if directed upon herself. "Do as the lasses do; say no, but—*do it.*"

She was silent, not daring to ask was

he—could he, be thinking of her card; longing to explain.

But how could she—when no one asked her to do so?

"Well, thanks, Colonel Dunn. For my own part, I should like to go home soon, but my husband will never come away so early. He likes dances," said the little, tired woman, with a querulous voice, accepting the wine.

"Who is that lady?" Daisy now hazarded asking Gascoigne, feeling she must say something, and with a most ridiculously timid manner.

"That is Mrs. Burke, the wife of Colonel Burke, whom you saw out there under the stairs."

What! wife of the man who was flirting so busily with Birdie. Though little Miss Dimity said nothing, while her eyes were

thus opened, she knew by something in his voice, so fine it could hardly be given a name, that the same thought was in the mind of the quiet man beside her.

But up came Lee towards her gaily—banishing reflection.

Poor Miss Browne rose slowly to intercept him, while her eyes wandered, as it were, over his face, with a pitifully foolish gaze.

"You haven't once asked me yet this evening," she whispered solemnly, stopping his way.

"So sorry, Miss Browne. You *will* excuse me, *won't you?*—but my card is unfortunately quite full!" answered Lee, terribly embarrassed (though of course he never lost his presence of mind).

Miss Browne gave a "green-eyed," despairing look, broke her fan across her knee, and let it drop weakly by her side;

then, as he offered his arm to Daisy, anxious to escape, she put up both hands to her face, and burst out crying.

There was consternation amongst those near in the tea-room.

Mrs. Browne bustled up to her daughter, declaring volubly it was "hysterics," "neuralgia," "overcome with heat." Somebody (it was Gascoigne) whispered hastily to Lee he had better get quickly out of the room. There was a cry for smelling-salts—air—a fan.

"Take mine, please," entreated Daisy, thrusting into Gascoigne's hand her pretty ivory and feather fan, and he nodded.

"You'll never see it again; she'll keep it," whispered Essie Smeeth, jumping at Daisy.

"She may," returned the latter, heroically, and Lee and Gascoigne looked applause.

The last thing both partners saw was Gascoigne quickly and quietly handing a tumbler of cold water to the agitated group, a thing which nobody else had thought of.

"On with the dance," however!

The string band was going tra-la-la, as if no Miss Browne was sobbing in the next room.

Poor Lee and Daisy felt like culprits; but they agreed, in guilty whispers, it was best to keep on dancing "as if nothing had happened." So, though people began to glance at them as the rumour spread, Lee kept spinning like a wound-up top, till his little partner seemed to see the floor waving up to her, and away from under her, and her heart seemed rising, stopping her breath so that she could not even gasp for mercy.

Lee, between whiles, could talk of no-

thing but excusing his conscience; so that Daisy, however much she felt he ought to be engrossed by the matter, at last grew secretly very weary of sympathising with the false position in which this much-to-be-pitied, martial Adonis was placed.

The evening's cup of joy now began to taste of the dregs. Captain Gascoigne was no longer "nice to her." Poor Miss Browne was miserable; Daisy began to think she had best be miserable too (in a secret way, of course).

As she was in this dejected mood, the second "handsomest man in the British Army" came for his dance. He puzzled her with a new step—as he took care, with pride, to tell her it was—which seemed to consist in standing still for fully two seconds, and then making a gentle bound! A short succession of these leaps and bounds was soon enough for Daisy; who

was afraid of doing likewise, lest she might bound on his feet.

In the intervals he also insisted on talking of nothing but the Browne episode, which distressed poor Daisy who felt almost guilty; and was anxious besides to veil the weakness of her sex.

Colonel Burke spoke in small whispers that made him seem ashamed of what he was saying, although he only meant to be insinuating. His sentences always seemed trying to wriggle themselves into one's mind; while he transfixed his partner with a constant gaze of his black orbs, which seemed to answer in his own estimation to "a steady fire upon the enemy."

"So you don't like me to laugh at Miss Browne, he! he!" he softly confided, as if they had a state secret between them; then opening his mouth to laugh in a queer, soundless, equally mysterious way. "But

you must acknowledge she is very long in the tooth!"

Now poor Miss Browne was afflicted by nature with teeth, as said a great foreign critic cruelly of Englishwomen in general, much resembling piano keys. But this was not the colonel's meaning.

"Don't you know what I mean? Why, old!—of course. Don't you hate girls when they get to that age? I do. Now anyone can see *you* are only just out," he imparted—with a furtive manner and a clandestine pressure of Miss Dimity's hand against his side, as his eyes tried to stir up the "steady fire" by a murderously-killing glance.

But if this gay Lovelace meant to go up like the rocket in Miss Dimity's estimation, he only succeeded in coming down like the stick. Her blood quite boiled at the insolence of a middle-aged married

man—which made it worse!—venturing to press her hand.

"I mean to grow old myself some day," she said, with magnificent dignity, and sailed back to Mrs. Cox's side.

The dance gave her no more pleasure now; only—she strained her eyes to the door. There was one galop yet, that might restore all things to gladness again, if——

It began; it went on! Couples whirled. No partner appeared for Daisy. She began to feel as if the eyes of all the room were upon her, and shrank behind Mrs. Cox to hide the imagined, terrible slight to which she was being so unkindly subjected.

At last, Gascoigne entered the doorway.

Daisy hid closer. She hoped he would not see her at all now, since he had so far neglected her. But in five more seconds she heard his voice overhead (literally);

hers being so drooped with the weight of his supposed scorn.

"I think this is the galop you kindly promised me."

Without a breath of reproach, the meekest of small creatures crept out of her retreat and started to dance.

One turn. Captain Gascoigne did not waltz to please the arena so well perhaps as Lee. His dancing was so quiet it could never be conspicuous, but it was none the less easy and *entrainant* for that. As to Daisy, she thought it utterly paradisiacal. There was no terrible strain, knowing the reputation of the best dancer, etc., might be marred by her awkwardness; no feeling that admiring, envious, critical eyes were never off her. (But indeed, if Gascoigne had shuffled blunderingly on her toes, all the time, she would very likely have been almost equally happy while dancing with

him. So foolish and illogical is the feminine mind !)

Another turn—and the music stopped.

"Oh ! *is* it all over ?"

"I am afraid that I came up very late," said Gascoigne, rather stiffly. "But the fact is, poor Mrs. Browne asked me to get her carriage called, so I was sure you would not be annoyed at my doing such a small kindness. Besides, you have danced with a so much better partner than myself —with Mr. Lee—that you will hardly regret not having had a longer turn with me."

Now, surely, was the time to say something. How complimentary, how sweetly, gaily flattering had not Daisy been such a little, little while ago ! Nothing came ; not a word. Might she not hint now that his step was, like many of his other accomplishments, that of a man

"Who can, but seldom cares to shine."

Gascoigne led her back to Mrs. Cox; then, evading that matron's instant artifices to entangle him in conversation (for Mrs. Cox made the most of her opportunities with young men), he said it was late, far later than he had meant to stay; and with a retreating smile, which Mrs. Cox entirely appropriated—indeed its frosty civility would have given no comfort to Daisy—his tall figure stalked away.

Up came Jack at once, to follow his senior's lead.

"Well, little one, you look a wreck. You should be in bed. I say,"—in a loud, confidential whisper—"how have you liked it, eh?"

"O—h! ve-ry much," in a very slow, dubious murmur. "You've never been near me all night, Jack. Do stay a minute now."

"Can't, child. I want to go back with

Captain Gascoigne, as I came in his hansom. Why, you didn't want me before; I saw you all right with Lee and the others, you young hypocrite! . . . Cheer up. I'll give you a grand turn, I promise you, at Our Ball."

But in spite of that fraternal recommendation, when Daisy Dimity once more found herself alone in her little room in Magdala Villa, she sat down by the dressing-table, put her head on her arms, and began to cry! Cried after having danced every dance that evening, and having been congratulated on her success, and "chaffed" about Smiler Lee by both the Smeeths and all the Coxes, as they had again reassembled in the ladies' cloak-room. Cried —as if she had never cried before! But as all women know what a relief and almost consolation it is to weep, and that

Daisy was one of those soft souls who weep easily, let us hope that by morning she felt all the better of her midnight grief.

CHAPTER XI.

"Le soldat baille sous la tente,
Le matelot sur le tillac,
Bientôt ils ont l'âme contente,
Avec la pipe de tabac;
Si pourtant survient une belle,
A l'instant le cœur fait tic-tac,
Et L'Amant oublie auprès d'elle
Jusqu'à la pipe de tabac."

IT was the day of Mrs. Luxton's picnic up the river.

Three or four boats-full of the party were pulling up the stream; by meadows where the cows grazed knee-deep in buttercups; by cherry orchards round tiny hamlets; by great reed-beds, which the wild ducks haunted in the winter time.

They had already left the smoky town and its suburbs far behind, All had settled down into their places, forgetting the rubs of starting, the hampers mislaid, the wrong persons who *would* sit beside them.

The day was of a warm, delicious grey, with veiled sunshine that made all nature, mead, copse, and green woods crowning the heights on either side, seem reposing in that gentle stillness; which lit up the cool depths of the river, without merely dazzling on the surface.

It was about three o'clock; for they had not left Marstown until afternoon, meaning to have a five o'clock dinner, and wait to row back by moonlight. There was one large steam-launch, which held most of the guests. The smaller boats belonged to some of the officers in Marstown, who, dressed as gay as Tom Bowlings for the

day, had invited the ladies of the party who were fairest in their eyes, to grace their trim-built wherries.

"You'll come in our boat. I know you would like that best," young Lee had said to Daisy, on the pier, when starting. He felt rather hurt when she refused; though, since their famous ride, his too great ardour for Daisy had imperceptibly cooled, and there was Miss Le Hunt, a "county" beauty, whom, having met only two days ago, he had already begun to admire.

Poor Smiler! He really felt that he loved all his old flames as much as ever; but then he loved the new ones too! It is a hard thing when new friends appear on one's life-horizon, that one cannot have dances enough, and time and opportunities for attention enough, to keep the old friends from feeling thrust out into the cold, and their friendly rights filched by the

strangers. Only by slight self-denial, and the remembrance that the sister of his chum had claims above all others, did the Smiler give that invitation with such true genial warmth.

So Daisy would not go with him. No matter. Miss Le Hunt did not hesitate, but sprang into his boat with a will. Lee could not but remember that her father's place, only five miles off, must have good partridge-shooting in September; and, without being inclined to toady any girl for ulterior purposes, he said to himself he dearly loved getting good shooting.

In the large boat, Daisy found herself with the Luxtons, Colonel Dunn, the old Miss Silverthornes, and some men. Among these men, at the further end, stood Gascoigne. (How weary one grows of craning round to glance at a man's figure, that never turns to glance at oneself!—yet,

how uninteresting the loveliest river scene compared with the back of a grey tweed suit!) Besides, there were a good many people whom Daisy did not know.

"Who are they?" she asked of Fuzzy, who was amusingly demure, and sat close by her side.

"County, my dear—more or less county. Some of them live in villas near the town, with two acres of demesne and big conservatories. The rest are the real thing; rookeries, damp old houses, mortgages, and a skeleton in the family cupboard a-piece. There are no men, hardly, left in the country, so the daughters like to have some of the garrison society like the rest of us poor townspeople. But they are all far above us—in their own estimation. They have mostly all grandfathers and grandmothers; or (if some of the villa people have come from Australia just lately), they

have at least 'a grip of the soil,' as the Irish peasantry say."

"But, Fuzzy, what nonsense!—surely you have grandfathers and grandmothers too!"

"Hush, dear, no. Only on our mother's side—. Can she hear? she'd be so angry if she did? I do assure you that, except at some omnibus ball, or garrison dance, I've never been asked with any of these people before; and, of course, we owe it to you that Mrs. Luxton did."

So saying, Fuzzy, being in a specially confidential and loving mood, feeling shy of the strangers, gave Daisy's arm a secret hug.

"But," said Daisy, blushing up, "you know my grandfather bought Elm Hall quite lately; and before that he was only—"

"Don't tell me. I don't want to know," exclaimed Fuzzy, stopping her ears.

"Why! for worlds I wouldn't burden my conscience with any unwelcome truth that might turn into a fib, when the people here ask me about your family and country seat. My dear, you have a 'grip of the soil,' too—that's enough! Oh! there are plenty of people in Marstown itself, bankers, and lawyers, and doctors, who inherited the highest circles of ready-made clients and so forth from *their* fathers before them, who have all graveyards full of grandfathers that would beat those of the villa people into fits (if ghosts could do such a thing!). But, though they know the county people to a certain degree (there are some of them in that boat there), they keep to their own hum-drum respectability circle, and don't know *us* new-comers of some years ago. Ha, ha!" with a good-humoured, yet rather vexed laugh. "It is a funny world!"

"I hope that profound philosophical remark was not meant to be kept a secret, Miss Cox," said Gascoigne's voice close behind, making both the girls start. He and Colonel Dunn were smoking near the boiler; and, the boat being small, a fact both girls had forgotten, one could not well help overhearing, unless one walked overboard. Daisy blushed; Fuzzy laughed louder; both wondering how much had been overheard.

"We were only talking of the cliques and sets that people in Marstown have. Isn't it stuff?"

"Ay, ay! Birth's gude, but breedin's better, as the proverb says," cried the colonel, with a kindly covert glance at Daisy, showing he had heard her confession as to her grandfather. "But where will you go and not find the same thing? In every place I've ever been quartered

there were circles within circles, like wheels within wheels."

"Yes, indeed," echoed Gascoigne. "That reminds me of an attempt at a military sermon I once heard at Dover from a young petticoat person, who was discoursing on the helmet of salvation. He said, 'So the helmet, my brethren, looks down on the shako, and the shako looks down on the busby! And—and—' Not remembering what could possibly come after the busby, he got very red—so he ended up, 'Amen,' and fairly fled."

"When I was in Dublin, they called the different sets cream, milk, and buttermilk. I went in for buttermilk," quoth Jack, who had just come up from discoursing the stoker, with a view to practical knowledge.

"Eh, eh, eh! Went in for buttermilk. Come, that's honest. Do you know the

Yankee proverb, 'It is not well to *pray* cream and live skim-milk'? When were you there; not with us, eh?" cried the colonel, in his crackling, cheery voice, as if he was letting off ever so many gay little squibs.

"No, sir. It was only when I was in a militia regiment before passing for the army. We did not do very well at our last inspection; for when one of our captains was ordered to put his company through their drill, some one whispered to the colonel who was inspecting, 'Och, colonel dear! sure Captain Jones and his men are not on *spaking terms!*'"

"Do you remember Dryden's unkind allusion to militia?" smiled Gascoigne, turning aside to Daisy.

"'And raw in fields the rude militia swarms;
Mouths without hands, maintained at vast expense,
In peace a charge, in war a weak defence.'"

Daisy did not know it; but she felt and looked so happy at Gascoigne's having at last addressed her, that he might have been just as well satisfied had not Fuzzy been misguided enough to remember her family rôle. Hitherto she had been comparatively demure, and really more natural; but now she exclaimed, with an effort at smartness,

"Well, how you men do always play 'follow the leader!' If I were sitting alone, now, not one of you would come near me. Oh! often and often I've remarked that of you with other girls. But because one gentleman comes now, here are all three of you." (She quite overlooked the idea that they might have come on Daisy's account.)

"There may be some truth in that remark; but as I do not wish to be accused of acting like a silly sheep, I must take

the hint and depart till another time," answered Gascoigne, relapsing into his former gravely courteous air—and the smile that Daisy now did not care for, because it was everybody's. He used to have quite a different one for her.

There! He was gone away after having only spoken once. How tiresome of Fuzzy! Of course it was not *his* fault.

A lump rose in the little girl's throat; and, though she turned her head to gaze over the boat's side at the lovely river view, she only saw trees waving up and down, though it was a windless day, while the herds of comfortable British cattle seemed grazing in a Scotch mist.

Jack and the colonel were now both busy expatiating on the chances of wild-duck shooting in the back waters and sedge-beds their boat passed. Engrossed by the charms of this topic, they had forgotten feminine society.

Fuzzy sat pouting at her blandishments having been overlooked.

Daisy, on the contrary, liked men to *be* men, as in her own mind she phrased it; and not drawing-room loungers. Of course, since her stay in Marstown, she had sometimes (especially of late) felt she would dearly have liked to pour all her perplexities into Jack's brotherly ears, no Polly being by. But, after all, so she sighed to herself, he would only tell her she was making herself unhappy about nothing; he could not understand; it was not his fault, only that—

"Women are women, men are men."

And, only that very morning, such a lovely fan had come for her! without a word of explanation; far more lovely than the one Mrs. Browne had forgotten to return. A marvel of mother-of-pearl and painted

daisies. *Now*, of course it was clear Mr. Lee had sent it; yet she had hoped——

Then she felt a hand softly placed on hers, and Mrs. Luxton's voice kindly said,

"My dear child, you look quite moping. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, indeed; only—only that I have been feeling all the morning that I should not enjoy myself to-day. Have you not got a presentiment of that sometimes?" said poor Daisy, weakly.

"Nonsense! When I was a girl, I always found that, whenever I did not expect to have a pleasant time, I always had one. And the contrary when my mind was too much set on anything," said the genial young woman, cheerily. "Come—you are my charge to-day, I consider; and I insist on your enjoying yourself. Will you come over with me to the other end? The old Miss Silverthornes are asking

for you, and I want to introduce you to all the county girls?"

So said; and so done.

Presently Daisy found herself being introduced to all the people whom it had been since years the ambition of the Coxes to know. Then she was cooed at and caressed by the Miss Silverthornes, who had only that morning dressed her sore arm. These spinsters it was the fashion to pet among the county girls; though aged, they were so sympathising, such "dear old ducks;" the mothers added they "were of such good family." Now, the old ladies related all the particulars of how Daisy had been the saviour of Fido.

"Dear Fido—he is such a *sweet!*" enthusiastically exclaimed the simple, little, second Miss Le Hunt.

"Darling Fido! I could steal that dog," chimed in Miss Normanby, the ill-

dressed heiress of Normanby Tower.

"Poor Fido—I loathe lapdogs, as a rule, but he is a jolly little beast," declared Miss Despard, a handsome, bold gipsy; one of the penniless daughters of Sir Alured Despard, the most blue-blooded baronet in the country.

As they congratulated Daisy on her "awful pluck" and her angelic conduct, Gascoigne, who had been "doing duty" at this end of the boat hitherto with conscientious self-denial (since he so seldom performed such society tasks), felt that his eyes were no longer impelled to wander so enviously to where Jack and the colonel were slaying the wily mallard in prolonged conversation. Still he sat nearly silent; or conversed almost apart with Miss Patience Silverthorne.

The young ladies, having received Daisy into their high-bred circle, were secretly

inclined to consider her "a sweet little thing" (how much for her brother's sake we will not inquire); but regretted to each other that she was staying with people of such dreadfully bad style. By-and-by, apparently paying Daisy the compliment of overlooking her—or else looking on her as one of themselves—they began to converse among themselves.

"Oh! dear," cried Miss Le Hunt, "I feel as if I should like to do something wild to-day. I feel so naughty, naughty!"

"And I feel so baddy, baddy!" echoed Miss Normanby, crescendo.

"And I feel so wickedy, wickedy!" ended Miss Despard, fortissimo.

Then they all laughed at each other's wit.

Daisy opened her eyes, most innocently; but then presumed to question in her heart of hearts whether this society was, after

all, so infinitely superior to that of the Marstown set among whom she had found herself. Only that these other girls, no one could deny, had a certain something of superiority in their manner, as if feeling sure of their worldly position by birth. Their carriage, that long-forgotten test of a true gentlewoman, was very bad, it is true; but their birth was as a moral backbone to them.

Still!—unceremonious manners and witless chaff are the fashion now-a-days amongst young ladies. No doubt, had these three been born fifty or sixty years ago, and been dressed in book-muslin gowns and black shoes, they would also have had, as a matter of course, the quieter demeanour of their mothers.

Autre temps, autre mœurs. And, no doubt, to go back further, our grandfathers and grandmothers railed against *their* children

as having lost something of the grand air of their day—or, when stiffness became the mode, said their sons were dull dogs, with no sport or jollity in them.

The Marstown young ladies, too, might well plead for themselves that they were—as to behaviour—what the century and surrounding circumstances made them. Was it their fault if gentlemen blamed them for the self-same amusing free-and-easiness of manners for which most sought their society. Surely not altogether! From time immemorial, cynical manhood thus has railed against womankind's frivolity. If women would but choose to form one great league—thus men are wont to say—they could rule the world, and make us and all things better and purer! Women answer, with an equal amount of truth: If men chose, they could make us what they pleased!

And now, whilst the young ladies were still laughing together over their wickedy, wickedy wit! and exclaiming in rallying tones, "Oh, Celia!" "Isn't that like Delia?" and so forth, Daisy, venturing to look across, saw that Captain Gascoigne's eyes were twinkling, and his face becoming somewhat red-brown; just the colour cooks give to the outside of potato pies with a red-hot salamander.

"How do you get on?" whispered Mrs. Luxton, who was here and there amongst the party like an erratic beam of sunshine, brightening all the groups in turn.

"Not very well. I don't know them well enough to understand their jokes, perhaps," returned Daisy, confidentially. "I would much rather, please, talk to you, or the old Miss Silverthornes."

"Well, I was afraid these were hardly your style yet," laughed Mrs. Luxton, low.

"I know—for I was brought up in the country like yourself, and never went to school to learn the *argôt* of most school-girls. It sometimes makes a wretched outsider feel as if they were talking thieves' patter; though it may be all very united and loving for themselves . . . No, come, here is a girl a little older, but whom you will like—Miss Goodchild."

She introduced Daisy to a dreamy-looking girl, with good clothes rather ill put on her; her hat frequently slipping down on one side of her head, giving her meantime a rakish air—she sometimes put it straight, but the heavy "Rubens" softly slipped back again.

As soon as Miss Goodchild found that Daisy was a stranger, she tried to make herself agreeable. She began to do Murray's Guide for the river, and then, when

the first stiffness of intercourse had vanished (for, though friendly, she was hardly quite at ease at first), she made a few more personal inquiries.

Did Miss Dimity like music, singing, drawing, or books?

Miss Dimity, in her small way, liked them all; giving it truthfully to be understood, however, that, her abilities being no larger than suited the size of her body, the only real gift she possessed was that of appreciation.

"Well, I am very fond of *books;* really good ones," imparted Miss Goodchild, with a rueful air. "Having no sisters, they are my companions; but the other girls laugh at me so if ever I begin to talk about them."

And she glanced at the trio across the boat, who were now sitting holding each

other's hands rather in the manner of Miss Kate Greenaway's little damsels—though they were hardly so innocent-looking.

Daisy could understand that; and though she was not very book-learned herself, said Polly was—and felt sympathetic.

"Those three were all at school together; they are the same age. I am a little older, and, unfortunately, am the only girl at home. My father always hated the idea of girls going to a boarding-school," went on Miss Goodchild, sighing a little, but not too much, over her loneliness. "So, you see, they always keep together at balls or tennis-parties, and have their own jokes. They are very civil, of course, to me, when I have courage to go near their clique; but still one can't help feeling out in the cold."

Daisy grew still more sympathising; she had a knack of making this feeling of hers

felt without using many words about it. So her new companion went on—

"Well, then, you know, one can't tell gentlemen either about the things one really likes—such as the clothing club or visiting the sick villagers; it's not their province to know anything about it. And even the other night at the barrack-dance I was longing to talk to all my partners about the 'Earthly Paradise' that I am just reading; but they would have thought me so '*blue!*' And it is dreadful to be called blue, isn't it?"

"Oh! yes," answered Daisy, slowly, with profound conviction of that truth; then added, with a sudden impulse, "But I think I know some one who would not have thought you too blue for doing so; some one who likes even us womankind to show the best that is in us."

"No, who—? Do tell me! Your

brother?—I like him very much already; but I am a little afraid of him."

"It is . . ." said Daisy, slowly; and she blamed herself for a grudging feeling in her heart, that made her speech so slow. "It is, Captain Gascoigne."

"Ah! I don't know him yet; but then I must get to know him to-day. Yes, I shall tell Mrs. Luxton so. And what a lovely, long afternoon it will be for him and me to have a ta-alk!"

The boat had grounded against the bank, interrupting the last word of Miss Goodchild's sentence. And Colonel Dunn had begun to shout, "Hallo—here we are; here we are! And now everybody must get out!—get out!—get out!"

CHAPTER XII.

"Upon a simmer's afternoon
A wee afore the sun gaed doun."

BESIDE the landing-place there was an oak-wood, as noble as any in all broad England; full of charming glades and sequestered walks to ramble in on that summer's day. And through it ran down a stream into the wider river, brawling and babbling between great boulders, one of the many clear becks in those parts with gravelly beds, leaving the stream so pure that the fish seemed like sprites arrowing their way hither and thither.

A little above this meeting of the waters

was an open grassy space, overarched by monarchs of the wood standing deep in fern; while the grass was short, and sweet with thyme, by banks of which slipped the trout stream, "sliding, gleaming, gliding," as singeth Poet Tennyson.

Here it was proclaimed the picnic should be held.

"And now, you young people may all go off. I mean to have the dinner all ready at five o'clock, and before that I wish to see none of your faces," cried Mrs. Luxton, gaily. "No demurs, please; no objections. My husband and Colonel Dunn are going to help me; so amuse yourselves! depart! vanish!"

"Ay, ay. Get along. We don't care if we never saw any of you again—excepting always the ladies!—the ladies!" cheerily hallooed Colonel Dunn, ending his sentence with an intonation of most abject apology

to the fair sex, which he altogether spoilt by a side-wink at Gascoigne, adding, with a chuckle, "It's aye gude to be ceevil, as the auld wife said when she curtseyed to the deevil!"

"Please let me stay too, Mrs. Luxton. I should like it, oh! so much better than going with the rest," implored Daisy, in a whisper of such sincerity that the merry hostess looked round at her in some wonder.

"As you please; but really are you quite sure you would not rather go with——" And Mrs. Luxton surveyed the departing groups.

There went Smiler Lee, still faithful, for the time! to his mistress of the day. There again went the Coxes, with Major Hodge, young Jones, and Captain O'Donoghue—to whom Jack had this day relinquished Birdie, with marvellous facility.

There went Mrs. Cox, rather nervously keeping near some of the greater ladies; and trying to interpolate some mild remarks upon the scenery, the weather, the foxgloves, into their conversation upon mutual acquaintances—whenever any of them gave the poor woman a chance.

"Indeed, there are none of them with whom I care to go," pleaded Daisy, earnestly, looking over where just between wood and river three figures were disappearing; Miss Goodchild walking between Jack and Captain Gascoigne. The latter had just been introduced to her by Mrs. Luxton; and she had eagerly begun to "interview" him, rather too much, perhaps, on her favourite topics; whilst Jack had apparently gone after his friend.

And all three—how unkind!—had utterly forgotten to ask Daisy to join them.

Mrs. Luxton watched the direction of

her eyes, but said nothing. So Daisy bravely patted out the cloth on the grass; and as bravely refrained from dropping a single salt tear on the pigeon pies and chicken salads. But by-and-by, when Mrs. Luxton asked her to take down a jelly, still in its china mould, and put it gently to cool by the river-edge in loving company with the champagne bottles—then was the opportunity for solitude and refreshing tears!

Daisy was all alone. Some bushes sheltered her from the observation of those she had just left. She felt like a Naiad;—she would have gladly dissolved in tears, and so been merged in the stream;—and did her best towards that dissolution by lying stretched on the grass above the limpid wavelets, with a willow sighing overhead, and a thicket behind her full of tall foxglove spires and banked with wild straw-

berries and tiny geraniums, while

> "The hot noise of bees
> Lulled the bright flowers."

"Miss Dimity, what is wrong?" asked Gascoigne's voice, with a shocked sound, above her, in the midst of a small gush of sobs.

Daisy was so startled she sat bolt upright; then, with one swift glance, hid her weeping blue eyes and quivering face in a friendly tuft of water-mint.

"I—I . . . Nothing," she murmured, choking back her sobs. Then, with catching breath, plucking bravely at the mint, and pretending to put it to her nostrils with intense relish; though it smelt worse than even old wives' peppermint in church. "I have only—*been enjoying myself alone!*"

Did her ears deceive her, or was there the faintest sound like the beginning of a laugh overhead, instantly checked?

"Is it not rather unkind to prefer enjoying yourself alone; when surely your friends would be only too glad to be allowed to share your—your feelings?"

"Jack, and Miss Goodchild, and *all of you* went away, and never even thought of me," breaking down at that remembrance again (though inaudibly, and, as she hoped, secretly), and having surreptitious recourse to her handkerchief.

"Stop, please, Miss Dimity; now that just shows how little you know about it," interrupted Gascoigne, pained for her, but really roused to defend himself. "So far from that being the case, I thought all the time that you were walking with Mr. Lee; and when we met him and Miss Le Hunt at some cross-paths, and that no one knew anything of you, I turned back here to see what had become of you."

"No—really?"

"Yes, I did."

"*How* good of you!"

This last assertion Gascoigne was apparently too modest to echo, yet too honest to contradict. So they both looked at each other with beaming eyes, and an air of extreme mutual satisfaction.

"Mr. Lee . . . indeed! So you thought I had gone with him. That only shows how little *you* know about what you were talking of," went on Daisy, with a sweet scoff born of great joy, and a little air of reprimand quite new to her.

"Well, how could anyone tell?" returned Gascoigne, with humble happiness. "Certainly, judging from last night at the dance——"

"Oh! what does it matter whom one dances with?" cried Daisy. "He had his name put down on my card, before ever I knew—I was so vexed afterwards."

"Really!" with ecstasy, but shyly dibbling holes in the ground with his stick. "Then—then you are not grieved to the heart, at his having first rowed Miss Le Hunt and then gone walking with her?"

"He asked *me* to go in his boat first, but I refused," quoth Daisy, blandly, unconscious of the real feelings of the Smiler on that occasion; but then, struck by some inkling of his view of the case, hastily added, "However, he really did not want me to go afterwards for a walk. He seems so much smitten with Miss Le Hunt; he told me so. He is always admiring some one fresh, I do believe;—he has told me of so many girls he thought charming, one after another."

"Fickle Mr. Lee. He might sing,

> 'If I by miracle can be
> This livelong minute true to thee,
> 'Tis all that heaven allows.'

And so he makes you the confidante of his loves. What a delightful idea!"

On which Captain Gascoigne, who was by this time sitting on the thymy grass at Miss Dimity's feet, laughed heartily. And little Miss Dimity, who had quite recovered herself and her upright position, laughed too.

Her hands smelt so nastily of mint, she now must needs go down three paces to the stream and wash them. And Gascoigne, with a lazy groan, must needs drag his lazy length thus far—not to forsake her again.

There was a little break in the bank where she stooped down. The wavelets washed over gleaming gravel; midstream there was a tiny rush of eddying water, but yet the rippling tide was clear and shallow, no deeper than your knee.

Behind the sitting couple was a thicket,

beyond this deep glade. Right and left the sheltering woods stretched up their green wide-spreading heads to the summer sun, while underneath their stems made cool, cathedral vistas. Opposite, across the water, an oak coppice, broken by faggot piles and cleared spaces, sloped gently upwards. But beyond this, here and there, by help of dips and hollows, could be seen some tiny, distant views of a farther world; some hills, a spire or two.

"How lovely summer is!" uttered Daisy, looking up the rushing river; and at the green glory of the trees, with the tender gleams of evening sun lying on the coppice; and the widely, kindly aspect of the illimitable sky.

"There is a ford here," quoth Gascoigne, irrelevantly; "I wish I had known that last winter during the hunting season.

It once would have spared me a long ride round.

> 'The track winds down to the cool stream
> To cross the sparkling shallows; there
> The cattle love to gather on their way—'

Miss Dimity, why do you let me quote poetry? What a prig you must think me! You should stop me at once."

"But I like it. Why—do you not do so with other people?" opening her eyes.

"No; you are the only person with whom I so far forget myself, now, as to talk just as I am lazily thinking."

"The only one—now," repeated Daisy, adding with mock jealousy, secretly real, "Then there *was* some one else!"

Gascoigne looked closely at her.

"There was—my little sister, now dead; with whom I used to sit by just such another river and talk as idly long ago."

A few moments of silence; then Daisy said,

"Is it not a curious feeling one sometimes has, of seeming to remember what one can have never heard or seen before? This is not the first time I have had it—and especially lately with you."

"Are we affinities, then; did we live before now together in some bright, particular star, and have only met again 'not in entire forgetfulness'?" smiled Gascoigne. "But ought we not to be going back to join the rest? It is best, I believe, for young ladies not to be conspicuous by their absence on these occasions."

They rose, and were about returning—when, with an air of haste and extreme solicitude, Mrs. Luxton confronted them.

"Where are my jellies—and the champagne, Captain Gascoigne, that I sent you for *ever* so long ago?"

A guilty start; utter confusion; then laughter and evasive apologies.

"They are still cooling in the water . . . They are reposing in the silver streamlet to the very uttermost moment."

"They are lost and weltering in the flood!" returned the indignant dame, laughing heartily as she ran down to rescue the cherished juice of France's fair province. "In plain English, you both *forgot them!*"

Then the feasting began. It needs not be told with detail how all the ladies sat round the cloth or rested their plates on friendly hampers, whilst the gentlemen, by waiting upon them, got in each other's way. How the champagne corks popped and the wine-glasses frothed, propped up in the grass at infinite peril of being upset. How everybody would eat of one especial chicken-pie discovered to be the best, and despised cold duck and flouted pressed beef, but revelled in lobster salad, and

began to feel sated over gooseberry tart. How the missing couples that slowly dropped in last were furtively eyed, and commented on with whispers. Then a lull came, and plainly the feasting was over; except for the servants and boatmen, who, the lions of the party being fed, were now like the little jackals coming to pick the bones of the feast.

And by-and-by again the party began to break up into twos and threes; again they showed inclinations of wandering far from the madding crowd; of loving to stroll in sweet solitude.

"You have seen nothing of the beauties of the wood, and up the river-bank as yet. May I offer myself as guide, in case you can find no better one?" Gascoigne had said to Daisy, with an air of would-be doubt, which a smile of inward confidence contradicted.

As if it were possible to find a better! Daisy's heart had eagerly cried out; but she only demurely dropped her eyes, and said she would be very glad if Captain Gascoigne liked to show her the way.

Jack had given her a look of broad, brotherly inquiry, a rallying grin, with a side glance of unnecessary pity towards the Smiler. Daisy firmly resisted the enticement to confidence of these blandishments, and tried to look as if nothing particular had been proposed; while her cheeks grew red-tinged as her namesakes, and her heart and her feet almost danced as she quietly went after the rest—but side by side with Gascoigne.

Along wood-paths, and up the river's edge they two wandered. They went and they went

> "Through the broad, grey lawns,
> As down the red sun sank."

And what they talked about, they could have hardly told, or known, later; excepting this, that while they talked they had been very happy. Although a man and fair maiden, with thoughts of each other that either would have given much, very much to know! their talk could hardly have been more innocent of coquetry or passion had they been two children wandering hand in hand. Until at last, having crossed the stream higher up by a bridge, they strolled back on the further side; and then sought to re-cross it again at a spot where there were some large stepping-stones.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Oh, Hercules!" cried Xenophon, "what wonderful consequences you attribute to a kiss!"

"Do you marvel at my doing so?" inquired Socrates. "And do you not know," he continued, "that the tarantula, although in size it is not so large as a farthing, yet, if its mouth only just comes in contact with a man, it wears him out with pain, and drives him out of his senses?"

Memoirs of Socrates—XENOPHON'S *Memorabilia.*

THE water, though shallow, was swift and sparkling; and the stepping-stones were wet with spray.

Gascoigne crossed them first, and turning at each stone to hold out a hand to his little companion, said, in warning,

"They are slippery; take care! How

the rest would laugh at us if we were to get wet! Steady!—Miss Dimity, I shall scold most tremendously if you slip."

He gained the bank himself now, and held out both hands. Daisy was on the last stone; but the edge of the bank was wettest and most slippery of all, so she eyed it doubtingly—fearingly.

A spring at last; but, with a faint heart, not far enough, so she lit on treacherous surface, and, though Gascoigne had caught her, her feet began sliding downwards. Before, however, her shoe had almost touched the water, before more than the sole of her foot was wet, she was lifted up in two strong arms on firm ground.

Did Gascoigne scold as he had threatened? Did he remember Mrs. Grundy?

Instead, it seemed to them both, however foreign to his quiet nature, and extraordinary to relate, that on

the moment's impulse he kissed Daisy.

It was so sudden, so extraordinary, such a surprise to them both, that it seemed like a dream. The whole walk had been dream-like; but this strangest of all!

As if in a dream, too, some distant noise startled them, and Daisy seemed to slip from his hold as if he had only grasped at a little sunbeam quivering on water.

> "Like a fawn dost thou fly from me, Chloë,
> Like a fawn that, astray on the hill-tops,
> Her shy mother misses and seeks,
> Vaguely scared by the breeze and the forest."

Verily the maidens in the days of Horace, although the daughters of so stern a race, were not so different, after all, from these of now-a-days. What was that noise—that terrible noise? A woodpecker tapping a hollow tree. Only that—but the old poet's description of virginal shyness still resembled Daisy's newborn alarm.

"Shudders spring, newly-born through quick leaflets?
Slips the green lizard, stirring a bramble?
She is seized with a panic of fear,
And her knees and her heart are one tremble."

Seeing her thus looking startled, like an innocent child, Gascoigne did not speak as if afraid of alarming her. He seemed too surprised with himself, indeed; although his face wore a most beatific expression, as he looked down on Daisy, who in turn looked lower still on the ground. Then they found themselves walking again demurely back, side by side.

Almost immediately, they both heard the rest of the belated merrymakers returning by a nearing path; their voices sounding louder and louder.

It was but a few mere instants since they two had left the crossing-stones.

It seemed as if Gascoigne just then was preparing to speak—to say something; as

if Daisy were venturing to lift her happy, frightened eyelids.

Too late !—in another moment the rush of talk, and questions, and gay chatter of the rest seemed to surround and overflow them ; but then they two felt like dream-people, quite unfit for common talk.

"Where have you been?" asked Miss Goodchild, coming up, and linking her arm quite affectionately through Daisy's, to draw her apart. "Your brother and I have had such a delightful walk—we were wishing so to have you with us, but we forgot to look round for you till we had gone nearly a mile. We had what I call a really good talk ; he is so appreciative, your brother—though he may not have a creative mind. Of course all men ought to be creative in intellect, and women receptive ; but there must be exceptions, must there not? and I do so love originating

my own plans for our village people, and making my own sketches, and my embroidery designs, and thinking my own thoughts. Even, sometimes, I try setting hackneyed songs to my own little compositions; do you ever try that?"

"No," said Daisy, humbly, feeling still rather in a whirl. "I am not clever, like you; I never thought of anything new in my life."

"Ah! but that only shows you are intensely feminine; quite a true woman-type. It is so refreshing to meet people whom nature has made typical, for so often she merges her grand boundary-lines, and reverses her attributes, as for instance your brother and myself." (Daisy mutely looked up surprised, for Jack had always been to her and Polly the type of all that was manly; whilst really Miss Goodchild now—if she would not let her hat slip

so rakishly to one side—had most dreamy eyes, and the face of a gentle enthusiast, with nothing strong-minded there.) "I gave your brother a fresh lesson in geology this afternoon," went on Miss Goodchild, cheerily, who, once mounted on her hobby which was Jack at present, gave it a rousing gallop before she got off. "I have only learnt the rudiments myself, but nothing is more improving than to teach another person; and, as I say, he *was* so appreciative."

"Geology!" uttered Daisy, softly, waking up to a sense of every-day matters again. "Why, Jack passed first for it in some terrible examination. He may not have many accomplishments, such as singing or drawing, but that he does know thoroughly."

"*You don't say so!*" said poor Una Goodchild, thoroughly crestfallen.

Now the indefatigable Mrs. Luxton called everyone to drink the tea which she had been preparing gipsy-fashion; having lit a fire of brushwood, and ranged the tea-cups on a fallen log. Her husband was sitting on his heels beside the embers, keeping the latter alight with most patient assiduity. His attributes, as Miss Goodchild would say, were that he seldom spoke, but when he did it was always to the purpose; he was never "in the way, but never out of the way when wanted," as on this occasion; and, though he liked his own wife's company exceedingly, as a general rule he so greatly preferred that of his own sex to hers, that he never could be brought to talk to a single other lady—unless Mrs. Luxton played him the unkind trick of imploring him to "do duty" with the dowagers she wished to get rid of.

There was a great pile of barked trees

near the fire, and to this Daisy had been drawn by her new friend, and made to sit down, whilst her eyes were wandering, wandering—but then Captain Gascoigne had said, "*I will bring you some tea;*" he himself would carry her tea, while Jack, in a humbler degree, was waiting on Miss Goodchild.

If anyone else had said those words they would have seemed most unimportant; but in a man like him!—and then that little but thrilling accent on the "you!"

"How utterly, consummately happy you do look! What does make you smile so to yourself?" suddenly asked Una Goodchild, with an embarrassingly clear, yet mentally obtuse gaze.

On the other side of the logs, while Daisy blushed and looked silently down, voices were now heard. Easy enough to tell whose voices.

"None of your moonlight scenes in a small boat for me,—haw, haw," laughed the corpulent tones of the gallant Hodge. "Those woods were near enough playing the mischief with this child. No, no; thank ye."

"I think it will be—aw—dangerous to my health to be out so late on the rivaw. Besides, it will be awfully slow work in that launch, in every way. It is only a mile from here to the Marstown Junction, and, if we catch the down express, we shall have time for a game of whist to-night," languidly drawled Captain O'Donoghue.

"I'm your man, too," struck in the deep low voice of young Jones. "You see I must be back early on account of *duty*."

"Capital! Ha, ha, excellent!" cried the rest. "We'll all regret leaving the rest of the party; but we are obliged to go back early

on account of DUTY." So saying, they stalked away, and Daisy and her new friend looked at each other.

"Are not all men horrid?" emphatically ejaculated the latter.

"Well, really—" began the dubious Daisy, quite grieved for the baseness of mankind.

"Will you have some tea?" asked Jack and Gascoigne, at the same moment, of both girls.

So the recreant warriors were seen to depart with much unspoken sorrow on the part of the Miss Coxes, and some murmured displeasure on the part of Mrs. Luxton.

"I hate men breaking up a party like that," she said vindictively, aside to Smiler Lee. "Why did they come, if they did not like it; I'm sure I did not particularly want them of all others."

"Cheer up, Mrs. Luxton; *I* am not

going to desert you, any way," cried the ever-joyous little Smiler, in his kindliest way, quite sorry she or anyone should be vexed. And he kept his word. The steam-launch was got ready, the little boats fastened behind to be towed, for all meant to go back together; and now, putting aside nobly all personal considerations, the Smiler set himself in the midst of all the county girls, and of the Coxes, too—midmost betwixt town and country—as if to atone in his own person for the desertion of his comrades.

The boat was too crowded going back for Gascoigne and Daisy to have any more private speech; but there could be unspoken sympathetic gladness and occasional furtive looks, revealing each other's eyes full of unusual light as, with an air of utter accident, they found themselves seated side by side.

How guilty both happy people felt of being self-surrounded by an atmosphere of love, whilst trying to look round at everyone else with an assumption of utter ignorance of any such feeling! How both secretly hoped their inward feelings might escape all observation of the cold, outside world!

So the boat went on, as the evening sunshine faded into rosy greyness; and the water slipped and flowed around and on with them; and the moon began to show faint but ever clearer gleams on wood and river.

The young ladies were now all surrounding and gazing at Smiler Lee like sunflowers turning to the sun, and he was at the highest heaven of his day's journey; beaming on all, emitting small jokes so gaily and constantly, he seemed a perfect funny mitrailleuse.

Under cover of this, as of the darkness in a wooded bend of the river through which their boat was passing, no one heard Gerald Gascoigne and Daisy softly beginning to speak—at last!

"You have enjoyed this day, have you —or not?" he asked, beginning in a tone of pretty certain joyous confidence that she *had*—tempered by a second thought of more doubting humility.

"Oh, very, very much indeed," in the very smallest of answering voices.

"Do you remember when I found you *enjoying yourself alone?*"

To this the only answer was shamed silence.

"And when shall I see you again? Do you know that I must be going away to-morrow?" went on Gascoigne, in a sort of protectingly fond whisper, which in every-day life he would hardly

have recognized as his very own.

A little movement like a start came on this.

"Going away!"—Daisy just murmured, feeling much as if he had said, "I am sentenced to be transported for life, and you shall never see me any more!"

"It is only for five days, though," went on the young man, unconsciously assuming a consolatory tone of voice, whether for himself or her was not clear. "I cannot well help it. You see an uncle of mine has asked me to go and have some fishing, so I wrote and accepted. If I had known —I almost think I should have put it off."

If he had known what? But perhaps we must not inquire too particularly into this sentence, which seemed intelligible enough to the two persons most interested; though indistinctly thought—uttered so low that how Daisy heard it was miraculous.

"Must you go—now?" with weak hope clinging to a straw.

"I *said* I would." (Paramount reason in a man's mind for doing so.) A kindly glance of manly allowance for feminine feebleness meanwhile turned upon the invisible pleader. Most of the force of this glance was lost in the darkness; only the tone of that newly-dear voice, the outline of that heroic, handsome head—ah! how could it ever have seemed almost commonplace?—discernible in the warm gloom.

"Well, never mind!" and Daisy felt her fingers just lightly touched a moment, as Gascoigne cheerily uttered—"At all events, I shall be back in time for Our Ball."

"And I go home the day after it."

Was it possible?—a few days ago would it not have seemed most utterly impossible! —that going home to dear Elm Hall should be spoken of in such a smallest of slight

tones, with a dismallest heart-sinking not however at all revealed by the voice.

"The day after! Oh! well, then at least we shall have our last dance together."

This was said with almost a cruel tone of joyous confidence; ignoring her small bruised feelings, her quick fears, and budding, crushed, unspeakable hopes—how like a man!—how very, very like a man!

"Hallo, Daisy, are you deaf? I have been shouting at you for the last half-hour," broke in Jack's voice, cheerily and rudely healthy, void of all moonlight sentiment. "What was it that they say tramps upstairs at night at Elm Hall? Here are the Miss Silverthornes want to know."

"We want to know, my dear," began the two little ancient spinsters, slightly agitated and speaking together, though afterwards they helped each other out with alternate bits of the sentence, "because

your brother has just mentioned that your home was in Royalshire. So we are very much interested in hearing that," took up the other. "For *our* old home, too, used to be there," went on both together, and then they fell back into chirping antiphony again. "And your brother has just been telling us of a tradition in your family that a footstep is heard going upstairs in your home at midnight—which is most curious, because the same thing used to be believed or said by the servants in our old home."

"The footstep is supposed to be that of a former servant in the house—an old man who drowned himself in a fit of anger, brought on by eating stewed eels, and because his wife, the cook, would not give him any more," quietly answered Daisy. An exclamation of astonishment broke from both the little old ladies, and then both held up their hands.

"How strange!—how extraordinary! Why, that is the very tale used to be told of our old home, Thornvale. It was bought by a Mr. Joyce—did you ever hear of him, my dear?—and then we heard it had passed out of his hands. But having no friends left in the county, we have not heard of our old home for thirty years," ended both, in tones of sadness.

"Joyce! Why, that was the name of my grandfather; my mother's father; partner of my other grandfather. He bought Elm Hall first, and then we came in for it," bluntly interposed Jack, relating this family history in an off-hand way.

"Thornvale!" ejaculated Daisy. "Why, that is—that was the very name of our Elm Hall before grandfather changed it long ago."

The two Miss Silverthornes drew out their laced, large handkerchiefs with very

trembling hands, and with still greater agitation of mind. Then they said both together, in tremulous tones,

"So it is you who are living in our old home. And, sister, she saved Fido's life —and we never knew who you really were." . . . .

CR-R-R! WH-I-R-R! The boat had suddenly stopped midstream, and its steam was all puffing in vain.

"Hallo!—stuck in the mud," cried the gentlemen.

"Back her!—Do this—that—or the other with her," cried the old pilot, and the somewhat beer-bewildered boatmen, and the hot stoker. But though all of male kind ran hither and thither, worked, fumed, suggested, contradicted each other, and felt brief attacks of suppressed, "strong Saxon," the fact, nevertheless, became plain—they were aground on a mudbank.

Now what was to be done?

It soon became equally plain that nothing could be done, except that hardest of many things—have patience and keep one's temper. In two hours at most the tide (for this was a tidal river) would float them again; meantime they could still comfort themselves with tea or stronger brews made hot by the help of the boiler. They all determined to *be* good-humoured!

And then, having been led insensibly into this vein of thought by Daisy's story of Elm Hall—or being swayed thereto by the influences of night, moonlight, and all the mysteries of nature around them that must be known to running river and nobly ancient woods—some of the party began to talk of ghosts, foremost among these Una Goodchild.

CHAPTER XIV.

"How gently rock yon poplars high
Against the reach of primrose sky,
With heaven's pale candles stored!"

MISS GOODCHILD was a ghost-fancier. No one could be more earnest and eager a young *connoisseur* in, and collector of, bogie tales, wraiths, double-gangers, and prophetic dreams; supported at present by Mrs. Luxton who had a great deal of volatile sympathy.

The men of course scoffed a little, but were willing enough to listen.

So they all discussed lightly the famous ghost stories that everybody knows, the

Beresford ghost; the monk who appeared to a late eminent church dignitary on account of a confession once betrayed; the curses which cling to some titles like disagreeable heirlooms, and so forth. But everyone seemed shy of telling a story themselves, till Miss Goodchild who, though generally pensive, became excitable when her favourite topics were concerned, offered to take the lead and was loudly applauded; Jack Dimity giving the signal for acclamations, since he admired her pluck.

Meanwhile the three county girl-friends sat together in a whispering group, wondering that Una Goodchild should always say and do things unlike themselves; which was their way of accusing her of the sin of originality.

The Coxes on the other side formed a family group, somewhat dashed by the

apparent disinclination to familiarity of the county set, however polite in a distant way were the mothers.

"Now, my story is strictly true——" began Miss Goodchild.

"Oh, of course!" chimed in all the listeners, especially the gentlemen, with some malicious intonations.

"It was told me by my grandmother, who was French, the daughter of a refugee nobleman," went on the young lady, "and she told it of her grandfather—no, no, I mean her grand-uncle."

"No matter," kindly interposed the male chorus. "You need not be so particular."

Faithfulness of repetition in such details being, however, the great pride of ghost-fanciers, Miss Goodchild eyed them all with some severity of suspicion; but then started.

"My grand-uncle had been sent away from home when a child, on his mother's death, and brought up at school in Paris. His father, a count, lived in the country, and seemed never to wish to have the boy home for his holidays. At last, when the young man came of age, he received an invitation from his father to go down and see him at their old château, to transact some necessary business.

"The young man looked upon his father as a hermit and a misanthrope; so went with feelings of some awe and natural curiosity, but very few anticipations of pleasure in the coming interview. However, he was well enough received by the count in the gloomy old home, and advised to go early to rest.

"During the night the young man awoke; and by the light of the moon was horrified to see a female figure standing at the foot

of his bed looking fixedly at him. This apparition had such an effect upon his nerves that he could only utter, while grasping a pistol under his pillow, 'Who are you? Speak, or I fire.'

"The spectral vision slowly shook its head with an air of intense woe; but raised its hand to its mouth once, twice, thrice! still remaining mute.

"The young man's nerves were overstrained by the effects of his long journey, the strangeness of his meeting with his father after a separation so long wondered at, and the influence of this gruesome presence, so seemingly supernatural;—he lost his senses and fainted.

"When morning came, he found himself still in bed; and no trace was to be found in his suite of rooms of the ghostly midnight visitor. However, requesting to see his father, he humbly asked leave to quit

the house, feeling still ill—and related what he had seen.

"The father, who had at first seemed only suspicious and annoyed at such a request, became, on hearing of the ghost, extremely angry. He laid solemn commands upon his son never again to breathe to human being such a nonsensical story about his house; and in great displeasure desired him certainly to leave the château at once, but not to presume to return without permission. The son was so disagreeably affected by the midnight apparition, and his father's strange displeasure on hearing the story, that he took the latter at his word—and went away.

"He never returned again until news came to him of the old count's death. Then it became necessary to go home to arrange matters.

"He found the château in much dis-

order; for the servant who principally attended on his father in his gloomy solitude had disappeared soon after his death, having plundered the château of much that was valuable. Aided by the bailiff, however, the young count began putting matters to rights, and having chosen a different room from that used by him on his last visit, saw no spectre to his great relief; and next morning he began looking over the household accounts.

"In these he was struck by the frequent entry, 'Tant pour la femme du petit appartement' (So much for the lady in the little room!)

Strange! What could it mean?

"Inquiries brought out the confession from some of the dependants that they had long suspected some one was concealed in the house. Search was at once diligently made. And then a locked door

was found concealed in the wainscot in the last of that suite of apartments in which the young man had seen the ghost. They forced this door; and found to their horror in the inner room a woman's corpse only lately lifeless, in which the young man recognized his midnight vision!

"He was still more shocked when, upon further inquiries, it was found that this had been actually the countess, his mother —long since supposed to be dead. His father, in a fit of jealousy, had immured her here after having cut out her tongue; this last accounted for her powerlessness to speak, on that night when she must with difficulty have made her way to the bedside of her only son.

"In the interval between the old count's death and the arrival of the young one, the servant entrusted with her care had robbed the house and taken flight. The

poor woman left shut up was starved to death!"

"Bravo, Miss Goodchild!" exclaimed Colonel Dunn, after a short pause following this recital—whilst he rubbed his old cropped head till it seemed likely that electric sparks would be seen issuing from the tips of each hair, so highly was he charged with impatient excitability—"Well, you do tell a good ghastly one when you begin; I will say that!"

Said Captain Luxton, who was a very quiet man, with a very quiet voice, but very twinkling eyes,

"It seems to me that Miss Goodchild's own story tells against her theory. The young man thought, like everybody else, he saw a ghost—and he was mistaken."

"Now, Harry, do hold your tongue," exclaimed his wife, whilst the fair preacher of ghostology looked rather disconcerted.

"There are plenty of true stories, as all the world knows, of real ghosts. Why should people have ever believed in them, if there were none; answer me that?"

"Yes, yes; of course mine was not a regular ghost story; but there are plenty of *true* ones," said poor Una Goodchild, looking thankfully at her ally. "I have even thought of collecting all the authentic ones told me by friends, and publishing them like 'The Night Side of Nature.'" (Publishing! such an idea—as if she could! was expressed by slight shrugs of the shoulders of the fair county clique.)

"Pray do; and call it the new Noctes Ambrosianæ," suggested Gascoigne, cheerfully.

The gentlemen would treat the subject with veiled derision, not at all shared by the weaker sex.

But immediately afterwards, afraid he

might have vexed her, Gascoigne added,

"I do believe, though, in the strong effects of imagination. For instance, a lady who was staying at my home last winter was fond of collecting curiosities; and some one gave her the hand of a mummy, which she showed me with the greatest delight as a new toy. Next morning she came downstairs looking very pale. She told me then she had dreamt that a beautiful, black-haired woman, wearing a long veil and dressed in white, came and stood by her side—and, in a low voice as if from far away, said, 'Give back my hand! Give me back my hand!' holding out a bleeding wrist. I told her it was her own imagination; advised her not to give up possession. However, next time she dreamed the same thing. And the following morning, in desperation, she resolved not to face a third such night, and begged me to

take a present of the hand—so I did."

"And what did you see next night?" asked everyone, on tiptoe of expectation as the speaker paused.

Said Gascoigne, modestly, though his nose raised itself with an air of enjoyment that was really irritating,

"I saw nothing."

"Nothing!—but did you keep it long; did you give it a fair chance?" cried the disappointed ones.

"I kept it in my room for weeks, and have it still. What more could I do?" meekly asked the hardened heretic.

"Ah, well! your lady friend had the gift of second sight; but you must have too material an organisation," meditatively observed Miss Goodchild, settling the matter thus to her own entire satisfaction.

"Jack, do tell your one; you know—the

horrible story," Daisy softly urged her brother.

Jack gave an honest growl, intimating no stepping before the public for him—thank you!

"What's that little Miss Dimity says?" cried Colonel Dunn, however; getting more excited and delighted as each fresh person was entrapped into story-telling, so long as he himself was spared. "Come on, man; come on!" as young Dimity still muttered sounds of evasion, which seemed to come from as far away as those of the Egyptian lady. "Let us hear your tale, too. Is your brother scolding you for betraying him, Miss Dimity, eh? . . Tell him, 'Better speak bauldly out, than aye be grumplin'!'" And the Colonel rubbed his hands gleefully, as if they had no more feeling than dry sticks, and, like Captain Cook's savages, he was trying to bring fire out of them.

Thus adjured, Jack began in the deep bass voice that almost startled people—considering his rather inconsiderable size,

"Well! I heard this when I was in a militia regiment, trying to pass for my commission for the army. Some of the fellows remembered the colonel and the other two men it happened to; but they were before my time. The story is, when the regiment was out training, the colonel, a captain, and one of the young officers were asked out to dine at a country house.

"During the dinner the colonel, who had taken in the lady of the house, remarked that his subaltern kept looking at their hostess in a curious way, and very frequently. He kept on doing this more and more—till after dinner, when they were again in the drawing-room, it seemed as if he could not take his eyes off the lady,

for wherever she moved he watched her, as if he were fascinated. The colonel frowned at him; tried to catch his eye; but all in vain. At last being thoroughly annoyed, and afraid the young fellow's excessive rudeness must be remarked, the colonel took his leave very early—so, as the other two had come in his carriage, they were obliged to go with him.

"In the carriage he told his captain why he had left, saying to the youngster,

"'How could you stare any lady so out of countenance? I never was more annoyed in my life.'

"'Well, sir,' said the other, 'if you saw what I did, I only wonder you did not stare too. Did you not see something very shocking?'

"'No,' said the colonel. 'What did you see?'

"'I saw a devilish figure behind Mrs.

—— all the time, and it seemed trying to cut her throat!'

"Well! of course neither the colonel nor the other man could believe the young one was in his right senses at this; so they concluded he had taken too much champagne, when they heard the gallop of a horse behind them, and, looking out, recognized one of the servants from the house they had just left.

"They called out to ask what was the matter.

"'I am going as fast as I can for the doctor,' said the man. 'My mistress has just cut her throat!'"

Jack's story created a slight sensation: the ladies felt a disagreeable thrill.

A change for the brighter was wanted, when old Miss Prudence Silverthorne, the eldest, began, in a high, chirping voice,

"Now, do let me tell you a quite different

ghost story, which happened to myself and my sister Patience. May I?"

Might she? There was a cheeriness about her tone that made the men believe she would be rational, while there was also an air of sincerity impressing true believers with faith in her earnestness of purpose. They hailed the offer; and the old lady, pluming herself something after the manner of a bird, thus began:

"In my young days, Patience and I were once invited up to stay in the south of Scotland, for a large ball and other festivities, to be given in honour of the heir of the house having come of age. Something, I forget now what, seemed likely to prevent us, so we wrote with regret and refused.

"It happened, however, in a day or two that the obstacle was removed; and, since these people were great friends of ours,

my sister and I thought we might venture still to use their invitation; so we wrote accordingly, and started on our journey before we could get any letter in return.

"There was no telegraph in those days, remember.

"Well; it seems some other friends had been asked to fill our places meanwhile; so there was a difficulty about finding us room, which we, being young and foolish, had never contemplated. The house was crammed to overflowing.

"'They must have the small breakfast-room,' our kind hostess at last said. 'While there is such a large party we must breakfast, of course, in the dining-room.' So that was settled.

"But then arose a question—as we afterwards learnt—as to our bed; for not a spare one was to be had in the house,

and, we being expected that evening, there was no time to hire one from the nearest town, which was at some distance.

"At last the housekeeper remembered an ancient four-post bed, which had been discarded to the lumber-room since ages. It was a handsome old bed, with carved posts, and a green velvet canopy overhead, covered with dust, and nodding plumes, that gave it a strange resemblance to a hearse. However, when they brought this with difficulty downstairs, it was found that it would hardly fit into the breakfast-room.

"For the latter was one of the oldest rooms in the house, dating from the days of the border fortresses, and had immensely thick walls, and a low, groined ceiling; so that the only spot in which our bed could be put upright was in the middle of

the room—which gave it a singular appearance, even more solemn and bier-like than before.

"Nevertheless, when we arrived, and found what pains they had all been at to make us comfortable, we naturally expressed the utmost satisfaction and delight with all the arrangements made for us. And though poor Patience whispered to me that the bed made her think some one might have been murdered in it, I praised its gloomy grandeur to the housekeeper.

"Anyhow, there was no time for qualms; since that night the great ball took place, at which we danced till we were tired out, and only went to bed not long before cock-crow.

"We had not long been in bed, and the house was very still, when, as I lay between sleeping and waking, I felt Patience touch me, and at the same time heard

the handle of the door softly turned.

"Now—as you all very well know—one's first impulse in such a case is either to call out in a hurry; or else to hold one's breath, and lie still very frightened. And this last is exactly what we did.

"Soft, small footsteps approached the bed. As well as one could judge in thick darkness, they seemed unlike the steps of man or woman, not heavy enough for the one, more pattering than those of the other, and therefore still more uncanny.

"They paused beside us in silence. There was a cold gust of air—then something seemed to pass before our faces with a wave and fluttering as of wings, immediately after which all came over the bed a quick, soft pattering, as it were. Next the steps receded noiselessly, and we were left trembling.

"Now I do not say that we were either

courageous or cowardly; judge for yourselves.

"All I knew well was that we were so far from any other living inmates of that great old house, no calls for help would have been heard by them; so as screaming was useless I refrained. Besides, I had once heard a woman screaming, and it seemed to me such an unseemly sound, that, if the THING had even attempted to strangle us, struggling in silence seemed preferable."

"Ah! but then you are so courageous, Prudence," broke in her sister. "She may say she is not; but she has the most marvellous endurance. *I* should have given a piercing scream, but that my throat seemed choked."

"Well, I may have endurance," went on old Miss Silverthorne, with a small serene smile, and a matter-of-fact quietness of

narration, that made everyone draw nearer in confidence, "but nevertheless I had no power to move from the moment that THING entered the room, and afterwards I dared not go out of the room after it; hiding under the bedclothes seemed a protection.

"Indeed! what use was there in getting up? There was neither key nor bolt to the door.

"We had not long lain still, whispering and wondering in fright to each other, when for the second time the same soft-footed sounds entered, and seemed to pause beside our bed, as if doubtingly. We had both now hidden our heads under the bed-clothes, which we tightly held down. Again we felt the soft touches, not straying all over us as before, but this time like two quick pats, twice repeated on each of the four sides. When these came near our

throats, it was with the utmost difficulty I could hold Patience quiet from hysterical struggles. Then all seemed silent again; and after a little time I ventured to steal out my head to reconnoitre in the darkness. 'It is gone—cheer up!' I whispered encouragingly, though I own I was trembling myself. But poor, dear Patience was trembling still more. 'It is coming back,' I hastily cried again, under my breath, to my sister. 'Lie still; be brave!' But she could bear no more, and, losing consciousness, remained very perfectly but alarmingly quiescent, while for the third time our dreadful nightmare came in pit-a-pat! This last time it crept softly all around us; but only gave *one* heavy pat to each of the four corners of our horribly haunted bed . . .! Once more it vanished, then all was quiet! And now, though I have always protested I did not faint, still"—

the old lady hemmed—"still I own to sinking into what you might call a comatose state. And thus frightened and feeble—awake, but still under the nightmare influence—we lay till the housemaid's entrance, rattling open the shutters, roused us to a state of light and living companionship.

"And then *she* gave a start and shriek, and *we*, slowly rising upright, stared upon the bed!—and *what do you think we saw?*"

Miss Silverthorne's voice had become very slow and distinct now; her intent gaze, as she looked round for guesses, showed that something very strange indeed had met her eyes.

"You saw bloody handmarks!" uttered Miss Goodchild, breathless with interest.

"No, no; it was a dog, depend upon it, and his paws were muddy," urged Colonel

Dunn, hotly, hoping for matter-of-factness, though Miss Silverthorne gently shook her head at him.

It was this—it was that—everyone suggested.

"You were covered with a funeral pall," hazarded one last adventurous spirit, taking a great flight of imagination.

The old lady softly smiled, and, in a small clear voice, said,

"There was a cloth, and a breakfast service laid out on the top of us . . . !"

"A what?—Oh, Miss Silverthorne, what an imposition!" cried Miss Goodchild, whilst Captain Luxton and Colonel Dunn, the infidels, exclaimed, "Grand! grand!" and chuckled in a manner quite disgusting to all persons of finer spiritual organisation.

The old lady now explained matters.

There had been a small page in buttons kept in the house of her former hosts.

This page was in the habit of laying the table early in the breakfast-room when the family were alone; bewildered, perhaps, by the late and great festivities, and oppressed by a fear of omitting any of his duties, he had risen in his sleep and gone mechanically through his usual routine—not remarking in his dreaming state the substitution of a four-post bed for the table.

The rush of cold air was naturally caused by his waving the table-cloth to its full extent before smoothing it out; his second visit had been to lay the knives and forks; and lastly, the four gruesome pats, which had almost driven life to its innermost recesses in the persons of the trembling Miss Silverthornes, were simply and solely the plump disposition of the salt-cellars.

CHAPTER XV.

"Our boat is asleep on Serchio's stream,
Its sails are folded like thoughts in a dream."

NO one seemed inclined to tell another ghost story; so Jack Dimity went for the tea-kettle, and—amid a roar of masculine congratulation—some surreptitiously brewed rum-punch. These both made the audience stronger to bear the information gently broken to them as follows, by Captain Luxton—

"Here's a jolly go! Our old skipper says we shan't be back till four in the morning."

Four o'clock! and it was now scarcely

midnight. Groans being useless, however, the male sex unanimously agreed that the ladies must be put under partial cover, at least, near the warmth of the boiler; whilst themselves should smoke and grumble aft to the partial satisfying of their souls.

But first arose a warm discussion as to who should house the distant members of the party on their final arrival in Marstown, since at four o'clock in the small hours no flys could be got near the landing-place.

Khyber Pass Road was the nearest place of refuge, and the Miss Silverthornes offered, with, no doubt, infinite puzzlings of mind, to take in all the "county people;" namely, two suave, pretty mothers, and three or four brusque-mannered, plainer damsels.

But this more than crowded every available inch of space in their cosy, nut-

shell of a home; and what was to be done with poor Una Goodchild? Mrs. Luxton, who was living in barracks, could be of no help, although the latter's chaperon.

At this—Mrs. Cox, discerning an excellent little opening for putting the thin edge of her wedge into "county society," hastily whispered to Daisy—then receiving a surprised assent, deftly squeezed herself up to Miss Goodchild's side and with an excellent humility of hospitality offered the shelter of Magdala Villa for the remainder of the night; only regretting that the half of Miss Dimity's bed and apartment was all her spare accommodation. Taken by surprise, Una Goodchild, who was really bewildered what to do, and had a very frank nature, priding herself, too, on holding liberal if not democratic society opinions, said, "Yes—with many thanks," both to Daisy and Mrs. Cox.

"And, Mr. Dimity, it is so far to barracks! You shall have the drawing-room sofa for an hour or two, and then early breakfast—yes, you really must," pursued Mrs. Cox, so delighted with the fertility of her own invention she could not restrain her kindly tendencies.

Jack demurred naturally enough—said he thought getting back to his own room, however late, would be better for himself. But then Mrs. Cox gaily reminded him that he could not leave her and the young ladies to go up the Khyber Pass Road without an escort at such an early hour. It would be quite dangerous, she said (as if Afghans or hill-men were likely to be prowling thereabouts).

"Oh! yes—do come, Mr. Dimity; do let us all keep together, it will be so much more fun. I am sure your sister agrees with me," carelessly said Una, upon

which Jack rather weakly gave way.

Back slipped Mrs. Cox, making elegant apologies, poor soul, as she stumbled in the dark over the toes of the county mammas.

"I've done it, my dears! I think I have quite fixed our future acquaintance with Miss Goodchild," she whispered, with pardonable triumph, recounting her arrangements. "And then I have asked Mr. Dimity, too—for evidently they get on *so well* together."

At this the unfortunate lady was overwhelmed with a torrent of reproaches, that had to be likewise murmured by both Pussy and Birdie; the latter of whom could not restrain her anger.

"Just like you—spoiling my prospects for the sake of your own selfishness, wanting to get in among the county set," muttered the passionate girl. "I hate the

county girls! I hate Miss Goodchild! I shan't be civil to her! Hateful girl! did you not see the way in which she was running after him to-day? and just when I had got him so jealous, too, about the attentions Colonel Burke showed me." (This was not strictly true; it might be somewhat nearer veracity to say that Jack's complacency under the temporary loss of Miss Birdie's favour had opened the young lady's eyes unpleasantly.)

"It is Daisy, and not us, that Miss Goodchild cares for," softly grumbled Pussy. "And, for my part, I think we enjoy ourselves far more without knowing the county girls. They do us no good, so why should we do them any?"

"But they might—One should look ahead, dear, and not be selfish," the mother excusingly murmured, turning to Fuzzy for help.

But her eldest daughter, though usually some stay and support, only whistled under her breath, laconically observing,

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!"

As all the ladies huddled together under partial cover, and tried to sleep, poor Mrs. Cox felt rather miserable. She seemed so nearly to have gained one of the pinnacles of her small social ambition; and lo! her own flesh and blood flouted her, and declared the prize worse than useless.

It was most disappointing, and she felt a vast inclination to weep a very little; perhaps a tear did steal down her faded, still handsome face. For she was verily more anxious for Birdie's welfare, as for that of all her girls, than even the latter themselves; and life seemed up-hill work; and she vaguely owned to herself they had not her own still elegant manners.

Then Daisy, being beside her, happened to draw a rug closer over the poor lady's knees, and whispered tucking her in,

"Dear Mrs. Cox, how kind of you to ask that charming girl! It was such a good idea; and she tells me she wants us all to go to a fancy fair to be held in her father's demesne next Wednesday."

There! as by magic Mrs. Cox's soul was comforted; so though the starlight grew colder, and the river-mist thicker, she soon slumbered comparatively happy.

As to Daisy, she was too utterly happy to sleep at all, or do anything but dream wide-eyed, or doze—while yet fancying she could almost distinguish one voice among the murmurs that were wafted with cigar-scents faintly from forward.

And still she thought, and dreamed, of those stepping-stones; and then dreamed and thought again, till her brain was full

of midsummer night fantasy. But she did not wonder sagely, as she had for Jack: Would *this* be for her own HAPPINESS—being quite, quite sure about it!

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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